

DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Public Attitudes towards Democracy, the Rule of Law and the Fundamental Human Rights in 2015

The present report summarizes the findings of a national representative public opinion survey conducted by the Open Society Institute – Sofia in the period 21 March – 9 April 2015.

The contents of this paper are solely the responsibility of the authors and should by no means be interpreted as reflecting the standpoint of the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

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CONTENTS

▶ Executive Summary	2	▶ Democracy as a system of fundamental rights	26
▶ Main findings and definition for democracy	3	▶ Reliable information on the business of government	30
▶ Political and economic context	5	▶ Factors influencing public attitudes towards the fundamental democratic values	32
▶ Government efficiency	6	▶ Conclusion	34
▶ Confidence in democracy and the main institutions	9	▶ Conclusions and recommendations with regard to public policies promoting the fundamental democratic values	36
▶ Political representation and participation of citizens in governance	14		
▶ Attitudes towards political parties	17		
▶ The rule of law	21		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey sought to identify public attitudes towards democracy, seen as a complex of interrelated processes and values in which power shifts hands in competition among different political parties, the government is accountable for its actions, citizens enjoy fundamental rights and participate in governance, and the rule of law is guaranteed.

The most important achievement of democracy in the country so far is the confidence in a significant percentage of the citizens that their fundamental civil and political rights are guaranteed: the majority of respondents believe they face no risk of being subjected to arbitrary violence by the authorities and they can freely exercise their rights to expression and association.

This confidence, however, is much lower among certain social groups of active-age people: one third of the persons employed in public service and one third of the people who identify themselves as Roma consider it more likely or very likely to lose their job, if they openly criticized government decisions. These two groups tend to impose self-censorship and to voluntarily exclude themselves from the public discourse on important policy issues.

The survey demonstrated also that “democracy” as a concept enjoys public confidence and support: 52% of the respondents claim that this is the best form of government for Bulgaria. This support, however, is abstract. It contradicts the prevailing attitudes towards institutions and processes, which are actually involved in the business of government and define it as truly “democratic”. Citizens have very low confidence in the institu-

tions of representative democracy (parliament, political parties, government). They perceive the country’s government as inefficient (unable to solve their major problems), exclusive (large social groups do not participate in governance) and unfair (there are no guarantees for equality among citizens and the rule of law).

Hence, the survey identified three major challenges facing the Bulgarian democratic model at the time of the study: a) serious discrepancy between society’s priorities and agenda and the government’s priorities and agenda; b) governance through exclusion – because of poverty, low education and widespread discriminatory attitudes the majority of citizens do not participate in any form of political or public life; c) partial and incomplete reforms unable to uphold the rule of law in the country.

The main result of democracy is achieving an accountable and responsible government. Yet in the current Bulgarian conditions this project has been only partially realized. Periodic parliamentary elections and the change of parties in government ensure that over a given period of time political parties would take responsibility for the success or failure of their governance. However, the majority of respondents agree that the change of parties in government does not result in changes in the overall state policy, while the low public confidence in the judiciary and the legislature suggests that these institutions still lack the capacity to seek and impose accountability to a government currently in office. For these reasons, there is a constant risk for the country’s government to shift to an authoritarian model.

* We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Associate Prof. Dr. Petya Kabakchieva who made important comments and recommendations to an earlier version of this report.

MAIN FINDINGS AND DEFINITION FOR DEMOCRACY

The study aimed at identifying public perceptions of the state of democracy, fundamental civil rights and the rule of law, to examine how these attitudes influence each other, and to outline the outlook of citizens on the major risks and challenges to their implementation into practice.

For the purposes of the survey and the development of the survey questionnaire two different definitions of democracy were used.

The first definition was derived from the Green Paper on the Future of Democracy in Europe, published in 2004 by the Council of Europe: „Modern Political Democracy is a regime or system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their representatives.“¹

According to the above-mentioned paper, the summum bonum of democracy is the accountability of those in power to the citizens. Comparing the advantages of democracy to authoritarian regimes, the authors emphasize the following:

- ▶ Democracies generate more accurate information about the interests and passions of their citizens. They may seem to be more contentious and less efficient in the short run – precisely due to their freedoms of expression, assembly and petition – but they will be better equipped to cope with changes in individual preferences and intensities when they do get around to reforming their institutions and practices.

- ▶ Democracies have internal mechanisms of accountability and responsibility that prevent rulers from under- or over-reacting to such external threats. The interests and passions of citizens –

when filtered through the competition and co-operation of their politicians/representatives – usually result in more measured and adequate responses to challenges.

- ▶ Democracies (unlike autocracies) tend to make more collective decisions that are regarded as legitimate, even by those negatively affected by them. Citizens conform more willingly to what is demanded of them because their political rights are better protected and, therefore, they are more confident that they may be on the winning side in the future.²

The second definition of “democracy” used is the one provided by Encyclopædia Britannica. The 1992 edition of the Encyclopædia emphasizes the fact that the difference between liberal democracy and the “people’s” democracies of the former socialist bloc countries is that political representatives are elected in competition among several parties, rather than in a one-party monopoly. The latest edition of Encyclopædia Britannica defines “ideal democracy” as a form of government having the following features:

- ▶ Effective participation. Before a policy is adopted or rejected, citizens have the opportunity to make their views about the policy known.

- ▶ Equality in voting. Citizens have the opportunity to vote for or against the policy, and all votes are counted as equal.

- ▶ Informed electorate. Citizens have the opportunity to learn about the proposed policy and about possible alternative policies and their likely consequences.

- ▶ Citizen control of the political agenda. Citizens are those who decide what matters are placed on the decision-making agenda and how they are placed there. Thus, the democratic process is “open” to changes at any time.

- ▶ Inclusion. Each and every citizen is entitled to participate in decision-making in the ways just described.

- ▶ Fundamental rights. Every citizen has the right to communicate with others, to have his vote counted equally with the votes of others, to gather information, to participate on an equal footing with others, to

¹ See: Schmitter, Ph., Trechsel, Al. (eds.) (2004), *Green Paper on the Future of Democracy in Europe for the Council of Europe by a Working Group of High Level Experts*, p. 16 (<http://www.eui.eu/Documents/DepartmentsCentres/SPS/Profiles/Schmitter/Green-Paper.pdf>).

² *Ibid.*, p. 9 ff.

exercise control of the political agenda together with other citizens. The system of individual fundamental rights is indispensable for the above-mentioned features of ideal democracy to be realized.

According to the definition provided by Encyclopædia Britannica “democracy consists of more than just political processes; it is also necessarily a system of fundamental rights”. Ideal democracy is realized through a variety of modern institutions, including free, fair, and regular elections, freedom of expression, existence of independent sources of information, freedom of association. Citizens are equal in their participation in elections and in the exercise of their rights, i.e. the vote and participation of each one of them is formally equal to the vote and participation of any other citizen.

The existence of independent sources of information is of particular importance for democracy to flourish: in an ideal democracy “there exist sources of political information that are not under the control of the government or any single group and whose right to publish or otherwise disseminate information is protected by law; moreover, all citizens are entitled to seek out and use such sources of information”.

Based on these two definitions of “democracy”, the survey tested public perceptions and attitudes toward six distinct groups of issues:

- ▶ government efficiency;
- ▶ confidence in the main institutions of democracy;
- ▶ political representation and participation of citizens in governance;
- ▶ the rule of law;
- ▶ democracy as a system of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens;
- ▶ public information on the business of government.

Such a broader and comprehensive understanding of democracy has been used in previous studies of the Open Society Institute – Sofia³, as well as in the latest academic study on the topic – “Quality of

Democracy in Bulgaria”.⁴ According to Antony Todorov, “reducing democracy to the possibility of holding legitimate and competitive elections is a form of reductionism in which democracy may be limited to the existence and application of democratic procedures.”⁵ The study “Quality of Democracy in Bulgaria” seeks to overcome this simplistic approach by extending the analysis and evaluation of the social conditions for democracy in Bulgaria to the rule of law, political culture, and the quality of political elites in the country. Wherever possible, such an approach has been adopted here also.

In 2008, in the compendium “State of Democracy”, Boriana Dimitrova outlined the image of the “disaffected democrats”, thus drawing attention to the conflict between the formally declared public support for democracy as a preferred form of government, on the one hand, and the passiveness and low level of public participation in governance, on the other hand. As of 2007 polls had also registered a tendency towards electoral ultra-mobility of the so-called “middle class”, which unlike Western Europe, in Bulgaria does not seem to vote consistently for the same established political parties but similarly to the poorer and less educated social strata tends to shift in its preferences. This, according to Boriana Dimitrova, creates a risk for the emergence of a “new generation of populist leaders who would not rely only on the ‘disaffected lower classes’ but would also strive to attract the ‘middle class’ that seeks new representation”.⁶

In the same study, Daniel Smilov termed the stage of development of democracy in Bulgaria as “frustration of democracy”. He held that despite the long tradition of authoritarianism, democracy finally had no alternative in the country and had become “the only game in town”. This stage, however, is characterized by “a muffled murmur of the masses and sporadic outbursts of unaddressed discontent on the part of various groups”, lack of confidence in institutions,

⁴ Kanev, D., Todorov, A. (eds.), *Quality of Democracy in Bulgaria, East-West*, 2014.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

⁶ See: Dimitrova, B. “The Shifting Sands of Public Opinion. Political, economic and status changes in the period 2002 – 2007”, in the compendium *The State of Society 2008*, Open Society Institute – Sofia, 2008, p. 13-33.

³ *State of Democracy in 2008*, Open Society Institute – Sofia, 2008.

and a general feeling that “elections cannot lead to fundamental changes in the political course of the country”. Smilov warned that “the substantial lack of alternatives – whether real or perceived – exacerbates competition between political parties in the field of unorthodox mobilization resources: nationalism, individual charisma, personal integrity, and anti-corruption”.⁷

In 2014, Antony Todorov wrote: “...democracy in Bulgaria is well-established but has major defects, compared to other democracies in Europe and in the world. This political regime, relatively new to Bulgaria, is not questioned in principle and there are no well-organized and active social actors in Bulgarian society to actively seek its replacement. At the same time, however, the majority of citizens are not particularly satisfied with the way democracy functions, tend to be very critical of its effectiveness, and often describe it as a “façade”, i.e. a system in which formal procedures are followed but which essentially fails to meet its own democratic criteria.”⁸

This survey aimed to identify to what extent the expert assessments of the state of democracy given in previous studies coincided with the public attitudes towards the fundamental values of a democratic society and to establish whether the trends identified in the course of EU membership negotiations and in the first year of membership of Bulgaria in the European Union have been currently preserved.

This paper is based on a national representative public opinion survey conducted among the adult population of the country in March 2015. The survey used the face-to-face interview method based on a standard questionnaire. The respondents were selected through two-stage cluster sampling. Out of 1,200 interviews planned, 1,178 were actually held. Collected data cover 1,178 persons. The maximum stochastic error is $\pm 2.9\%$.

⁷ See: Smilov, D., “Parties and the Frustrated Democracy”, in the compendium *The State of Society 2008*, Open Society Institute – Sofia, p. 34-61.

⁸ See: Todorov, A., “What are the conditions for democracy?”, in: Kanev, D., Todorov, A. (eds.), *Quality of Democracy in Bulgaria, East-West*, 2014, p. 609 ff.

Table 1. Respondents’ profile

By gender	Number	Share
Male	507	43.0%
Female	671	57.0%
Total	1,178	100%
By age	Number	Share
18-29 years	135	11.5%
30-44 years	287	24.4%
45-59 years	314	26.7%
Above 60 years	434	36.8%
Unreported	8	0.6%
Total	1,178	100%
By ethnic group	Number	Share
Bulgarian	991	84.1%
Turkish	107	9.1%
Roma	70	5.9%
Other	2	0.2%
Total	1,178	100%

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Bulgaria has been a member of the EU since 2007, which means that formally speaking, the country meets the criteria for membership (democracy, rule of law and protection of fundamental human rights). As of 2013, Bulgaria remained the poorest country in the EU, with a significant degree of income inequality, which has marked a slight decrease in the last year.⁹ After 2008, the country has been adversely affected by the global economic crisis with virtually no economic growth in the period 2008 – 2012. Since 2012, economic growth has been marking a slight increase (from 0.5% in 2012 to 1.1% in 2013 and 1.7% in 2014). After a considerable decline in available jobs on the labor market in the period 2009 – 2014, the fourth quarter of 2014 has seen a slight increase in employment (by 1.8%).

⁹ Measured by the Gini coefficient, see: Eurostat, *Statistics in focus* 12/2014.

Official unemployment in the country is 10.2% and has been declining slowly over the last year. As of December 2014, the export of goods has been increasing at a rapid pace, driven entirely by exports to other EU countries, which have increased by more than 12% since the beginning of the year. As a result, in the first quarter of 2015, the state budget recorded a surplus for the first time since 2009. March 2015 saw the end of a 19-month period of deflation (decline in prices).

Since November 2014, the country has been governed by a coalition government in which the leading political party for the second time is GERB. The coalition comprises two right-wing parties (GERB and the Reformist Bloc) and one left-wing (Alternative for Bulgarian Revival). In Parliament, the coalition is officially supported by an alliance on a nationalist platform – the Patriotic Front, which, however, has no cabinet ministers, while in individual cases when important issues are at stake, the government enjoys the informal parliamentary support of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Despite the incessant political declarations about reforming the judiciary, in the first six months of its mandate the government adopted no measures in this direction.

In terms of domestic policy, the most significant event of last year was the crisis over the insolvency of one of the largest banks in the country, the Corporate Commercial Bank (CCB). In early December 2014, the government lent 2 billion BGN to the Deposit Insurance Fund, which covered the deposits in CCB up to the statutory coverage limit. Currently the judicial proceedings to declare CCB bankrupt are still underway and it is unclear what part of the creditors would be satisfied from its assets or how much of the funds will be recovered to the Deposit Insurance Fund.

From a foreign policy perspective Bulgaria faces a number of serious challenges. The continuing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East pose serious risks to national security. Over the past three years, Bulgaria has been seen a considerable increase in the number of refugees and migrants, mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, who periodically become the target of xenophobic and racist sentiments.

According to international studies assessing the state of democracy, corruption and media freedom in individual countries (for instance Freedom House's "Nations in Transit"), in 2013-2014 the situation in

Bulgaria is worsening on most of these indicators, the overall assessment being that the country is a "semi-consolidated democracy". In the examined period, Bulgaria's score in the Freedom House's survey has worsened on the indicators "Electoral Process", "National Democratic Governance" and "Corruption". Similar trends were also registered in other Central and Eastern European countries (notably in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia). Freedom House recognizes that in the last 25 years all the countries in the region have made significant progress towards consolidating democratic institutions and protecting fundamental civil rights but notes that "for all these achievements, the role of money in politics, the pliability of judicial institutions, and economically weakening media sectors all raise concerns about the durability of democratic gains".¹⁰

At the same time, international and national observers register improvement on civil society indicators in Bulgaria: a great variety of civil organizations operate in the country, some of which have been recognized by central and local governments as important partners in the process of reforming individual public policies; a number of institutions have established and maintain civic councils which discuss key proposals for legislative changes; citizens, at least through social networks, express their opinion freely and organize themselves for joint initiatives.

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

The results of the survey show that for the majority of respondents the most important problems in the country are poverty and unemployment – they have been identified as such by 36% and 32% of respondents, respectively.

Corruption was identified as the third major challenge for the country, cited by 14% of respondents, i.e. in relative weight corruption is half as significant as that of poverty and unemployment. It is interesting to note that poverty was cited as a major problem by all

¹⁰ Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2014: Eurasia's Rupture with Democracy, p. 5 (www.freedomhouse.org).

main demographic groups, even by actively employed persons and among respondents with above-average income. Poverty is by far the most important social problem according to the respondents who identified themselves as Roma – half of them (54%) cited poverty as a major problem against a national average of 36%.

People with low level of education tend to be more sensitive to poverty (i.e. they identify it as a problem more often than the average citizen). Poverty is the most serious problem for 48% of those with basic education and for 52% of those with primary or lower education compared to a national average of 36%. Respondents who would vote for the Bulgarian Socialist Party and unemployed retired persons also identified poverty as a major problem more often than the average citizen.

Corruption has relatively greater weight as a major public problem for respondents who have the highest income, for university and college graduates, for actively employed persons and for those living in Sofia: between 19% and 23% of them identified corruption as the most important problem against an average

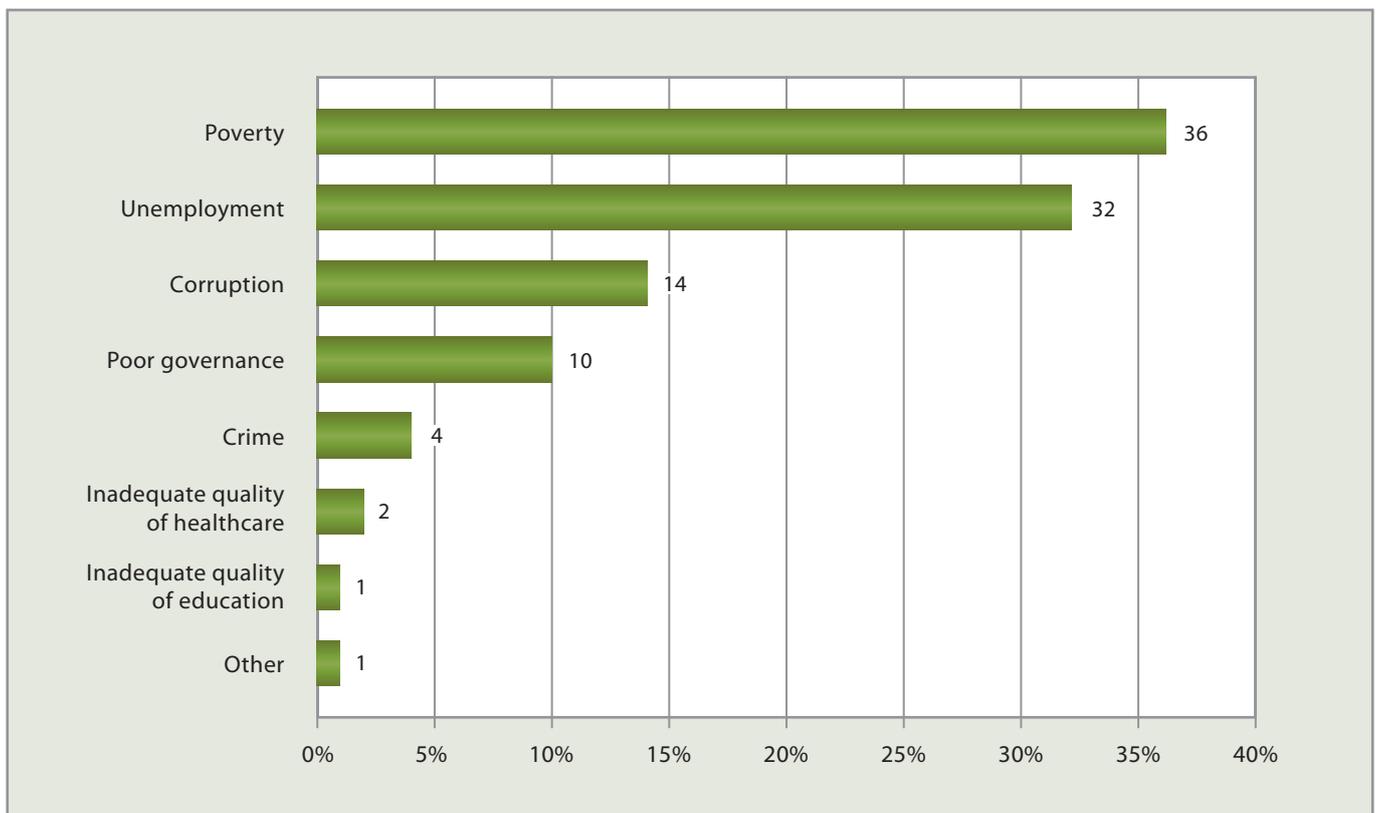
of 14% nationwide. The residents of Sofia have cited corruption as the second most significant problem for the country, while all other respondents ranked unemployment second after poverty.

Respondents with lower level of education are less likely to cite corruption as a major problem. None of the respondents who identify themselves as Roma identified corruption among the main problems for Bulgaria.

Unemployment is more important than poverty for the unemployed, for young people (18-29 years of age), for respondents who identify themselves as Turks, for respondents who vote for the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and (at a distance) for those who vote for GERB. Respondents from the Northeastern Region and the North Central Region also identified unemployment as more important a problem than poverty.

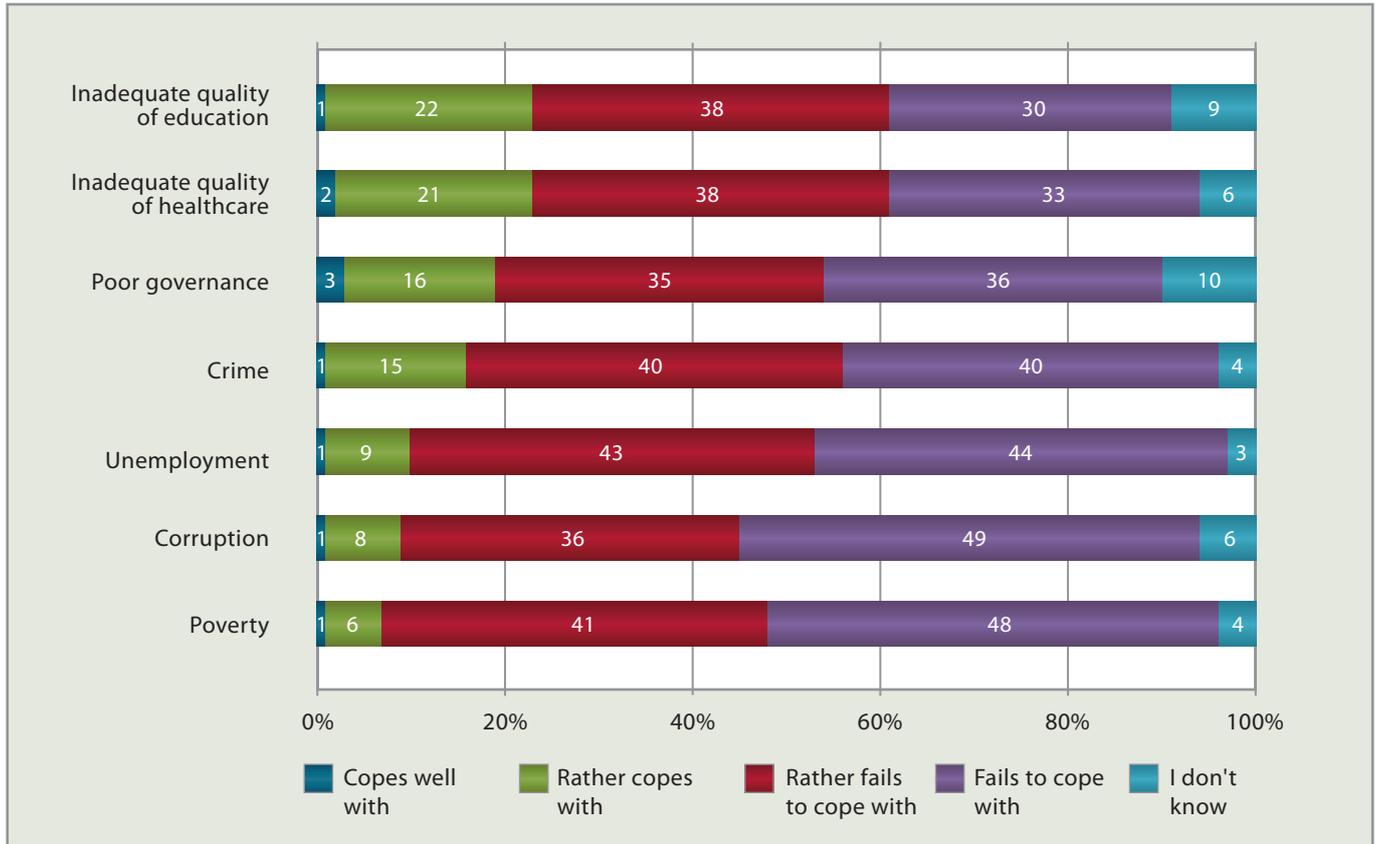
Only about 10% of the respondents mentioned poor governance among the major problems for Bulgaria. Crime, poor quality of education and inadequate healthcare were cited as major problems by approximately 4% of respondents or less (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Major problems in the country



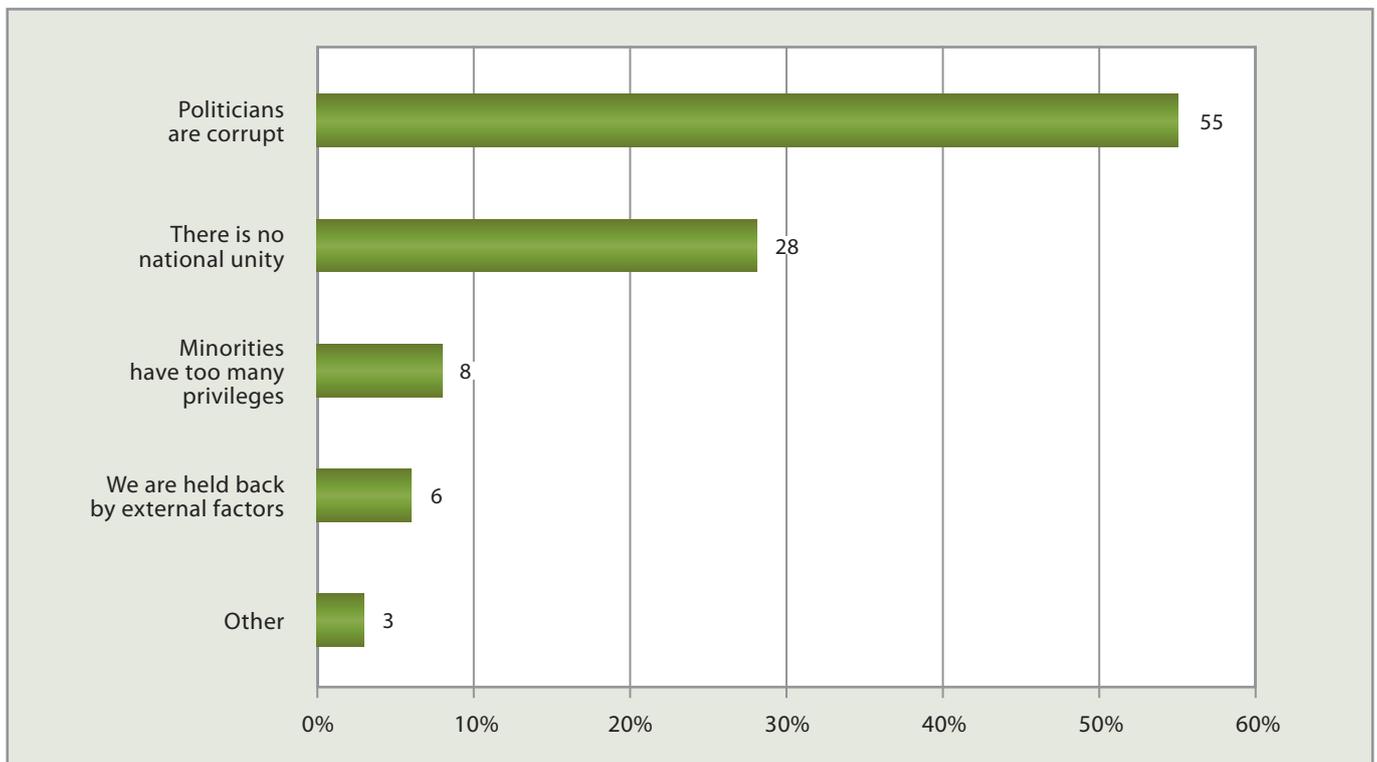
Question: *What is the most important problem confronting the country at the moment?*
 (Please, choose only one answer.)

Figure 2. Government efficiency



Question: Please, rate the extent to which the government copes with the major problems confronting the country at the moment.

Figure 3. Reasons for poverty



Question: What is the primary reason for Bulgaria being the poorest country in the EU?

According to the majority of respondents (around 70% or more) the government rather fails or completely fails to cope with the major problems in the country. The opinion that the government is unable to cope with poverty, unemployment and corruption is particularly widespread, being shared by 86% to 90% of the respondents (fig. 2). This suggests a serious discrepancy between society’s priorities and agenda and the government’s priorities and agenda.

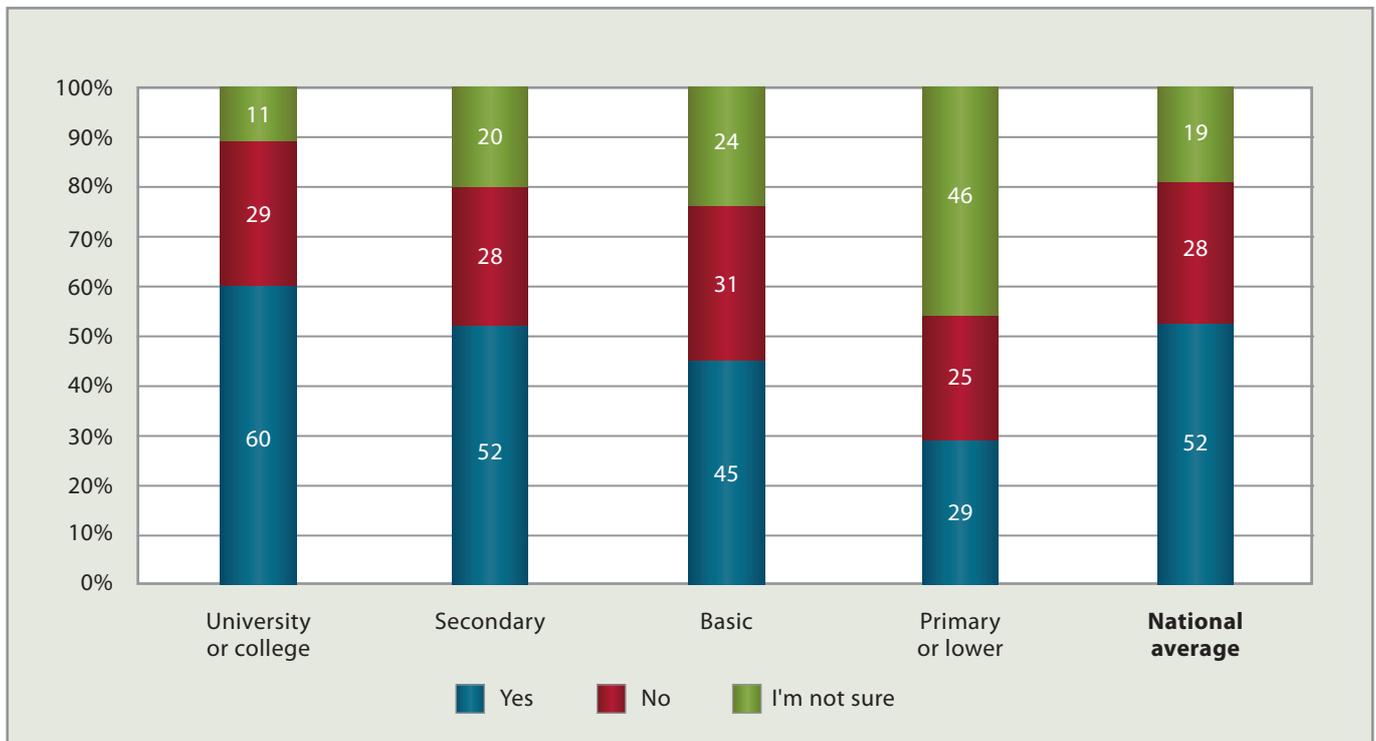
Although in the public perceptions corruption is undoubtedly less important a problem than poverty and unemployment, it is of great significance because for the majority of respondents corruption is the primary reason for poverty in the country. An overwhelming majority (55%) of the respondents believe that Bulgaria is the poorest EU country because politicians are corrupt. A smaller cohort of respondents (28%) cited lack of national unity as the most important reason for poverty. Albeit fewer, there were also respondents who suggested reasons totally incompatible with the liberal democracy discourse. Approximately 8% tend to blame poverty in the country on “ill-meaning external factors”, while 6% put the blame on the “too many privileges enjoyed by minorities” (fig. 3). However,

taken together, the capacity of the last three groups to generate and maintain an anti-liberal consensus should not be underestimated.

CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRACY AND THE MAIN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

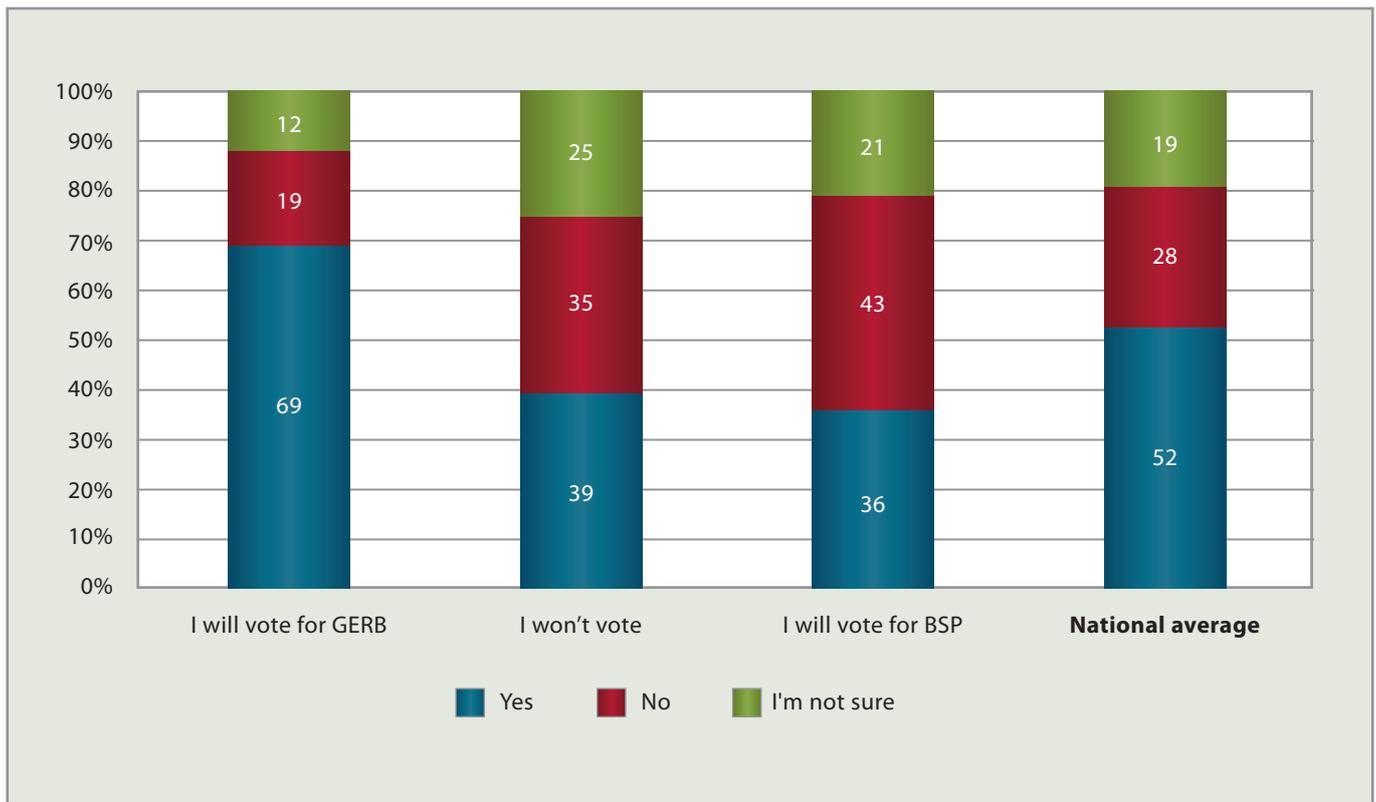
The majority of citizens (52%) agree that democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria. Confidence in democracy is higher than the average among the residents of Sofia (60%), among young people (58%), among university and college graduates (60%), among actively employed persons (59%) and among the most affluent respondents: 60% of the people who live in households with an average monthly income above 567 BGN per person tend to trust democracy. Conversely, confidence in democracy is lower than the national average among those who live in small towns, among the elderly (over 60 years of age), among the people with basic, primary or lower education, among the unemployed and the poor.

Figure 4. Confidence in democracy (by level of education)



Question: Do you believe that democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria?

Figure 5. Confidence in democracy (by political affiliation)



Question: *Do you believe that democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria?*

The level of education seems to be the most significant factor affecting the respondents’ confidence in democracy (fig. 4). Almost half (46%) of the people with primary or lower than primary education and 47% of the respondents who identify themselves as Roma were unable to say whether they trusted democracy or not.

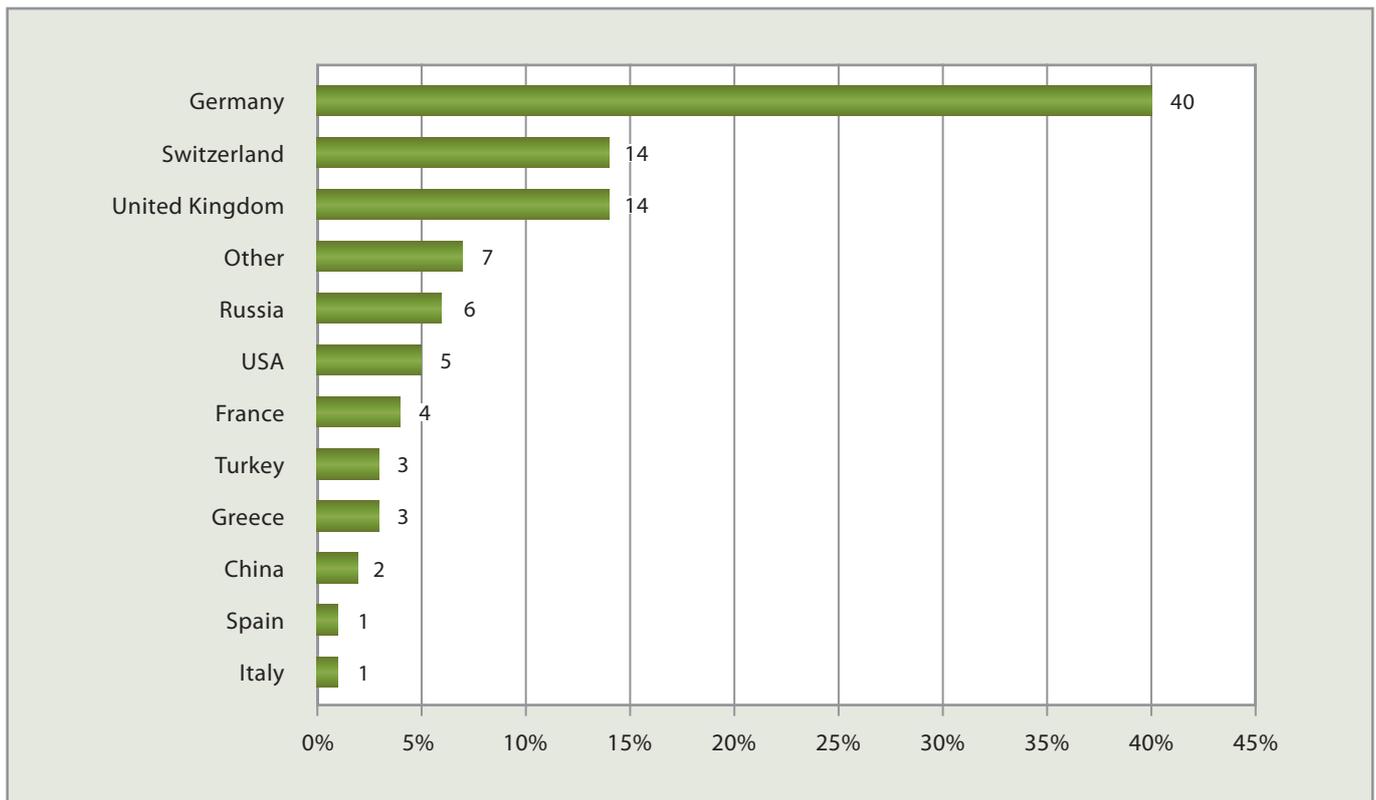
Public confidence in democracy varies across the country. People living in the North Central Region (the districts of Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Razgrad, Ruse, and Silistra) tend to have the highest confidence in democracy: 65% of them agree that democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria. The share of those who agree is lowest (42%) among the people who live in the Northwestern Region (the districts of Vidin, Vratsa, Lovech, Montana and Pleven).

Confidence in democracy is related also to the respondents’ political affiliations. The share of those who believe that democracy is the best form of government for the country is relatively higher among the supporters of GERB – 69% compared to a national av-

erage of 52%. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the supporters of BSP, only 36% of whom approve of democracy as the best form of government for Bulgaria. The share of those who approve is also lower than the national average among the people who would not exercise their voting rights – only 39% of them believe that democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria (fig. 5).

Positive attitudes towards democracy can be also inferred from the foreign countries, which respondents identify as suitable examples for the government of Bulgaria. The largest share of respondents (40%) believe that the best governed country, which should serve as an example for Bulgaria, is Germany. The top three best governed countries include also the United Kingdom and Switzerland both of which have been cited by 14% of the respondents. A very small share of respondents believe that the two large countries whose immediate geopolitical influence extends to Bulgaria (Russia and Turkey) are governed well and should serve as a “role model” for the country: 6% and

Figure 6. International example of good governance



Question: *In your opinion, which country in the world is governed well and could serve as an example for Bulgaria?*

3% of the respondents, respectively, have identified these two countries as examples of good governance. The United States are a suitable “role model” for only 5% of the respondents (fig. 6).

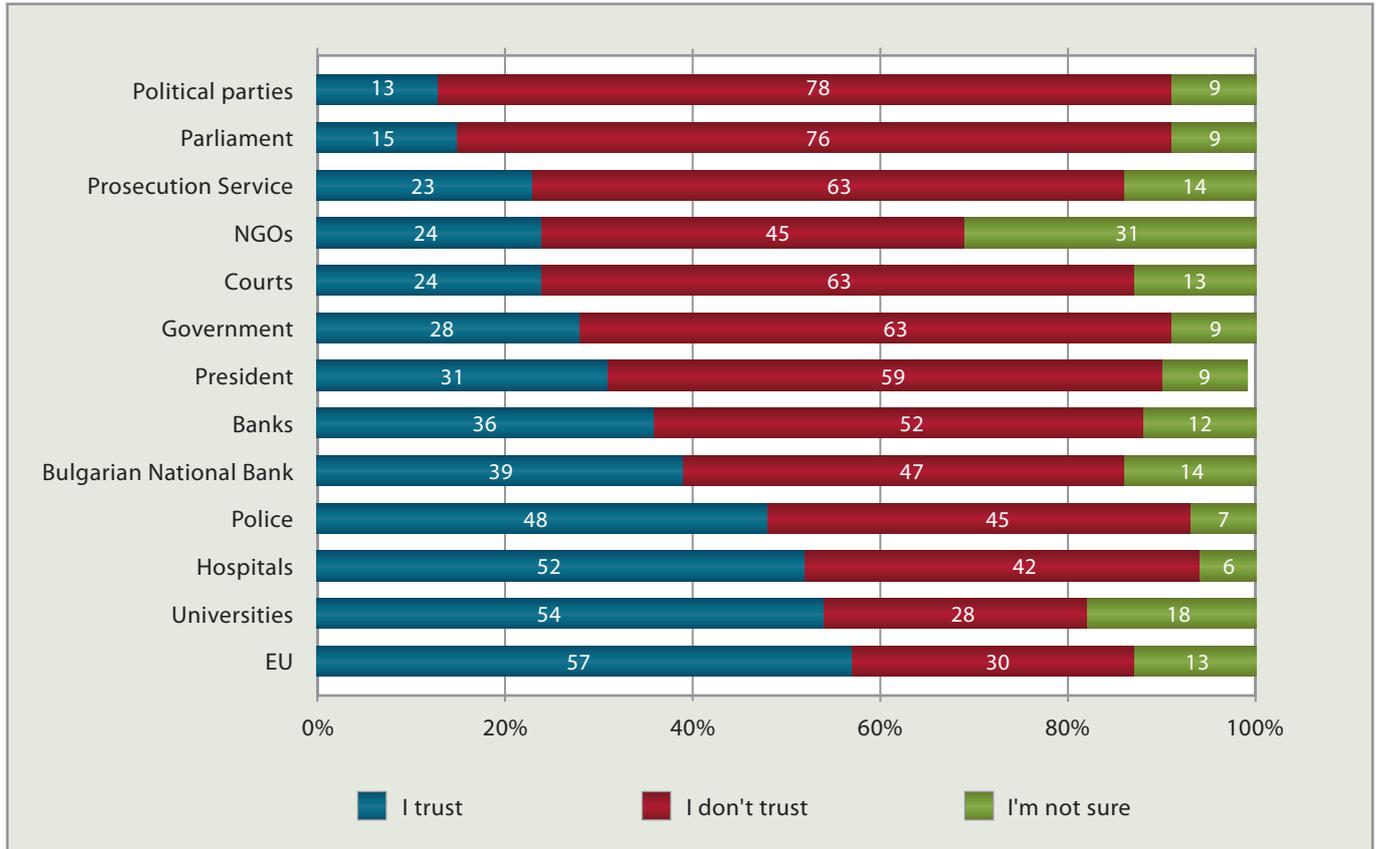
Despite the relatively unequivocal confidence in democracy as a form of government, citizens tend to distrust in the main democratic institutions. The National Assembly and political parties are the least trusted national institutions among those included in the survey, rallying only 15% and 13% confidence, respectively. More than half of the respondents tend to trust only two institutions: universities, which enjoy the confidence of 54% of the respondents, and hospitals rallying 52% confidence. Public confidence in the Police is also relatively high – 48% tend to trust the Police, while Courts and the Prosecution Service are half as popular as the Police (with 24% and 23% confidence, respectively). The European Union inspires much greater confidence than any national institution included in the survey and this is a sustainable trend, which has been registered in many previous public opinion surveys in Bulgaria (fig. 7).

The survey registered significant regional differences in the public confidence in institutions. People living in the North Central and the Northeastern Regions are much more likely to trust most of the surveyed institutions than the average citizen, while confidence in institutions among those who live in the Northwestern Region is lower than the national average. For one of the examined institutions in particular – the Parliament, the level of confidence is three times lower among the respondents from the Northwestern Region than among those living in the North Central Region (fig. 8).

A considerable regional difference was also established with respect of public confidence in the police: the respondents from the three regions of Northern Bulgaria were more likely to trust the police than the respondents from the three regions of Southern Bulgaria (fig. 9).

The low confidence in the national institutions of representative democracy is not a unique Bulgarian phenomenon. In 2004, the Council of Europe Green

Figure 7. Confidence in institutions



Question: *To what extent do you trust the following institutions/organizations? ("I trust" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "I fully trust" and "I rather trust", while "I don't trust" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "I rather distrust" and "I don't trust at all".)*

Paper "The Future of Democracy in Europe" noted that political discontent was a common feature of European democracies at the time and that this discontent was not directed to a particular policy or a particular party but to the core institutions of representative democracy in general.

A tendency towards declining public confidence in national parliaments has been registered in other European countries as well. According to a recent survey, conducted in Great Britain, for instance, the share of citizens who trust the government most of the time has decreased from 38% in 1986 to 17% in 2014.¹¹

In Bulgaria, however, this crisis is far more pronounced with confidence levels in national institutions being persistently lower than the average for EU

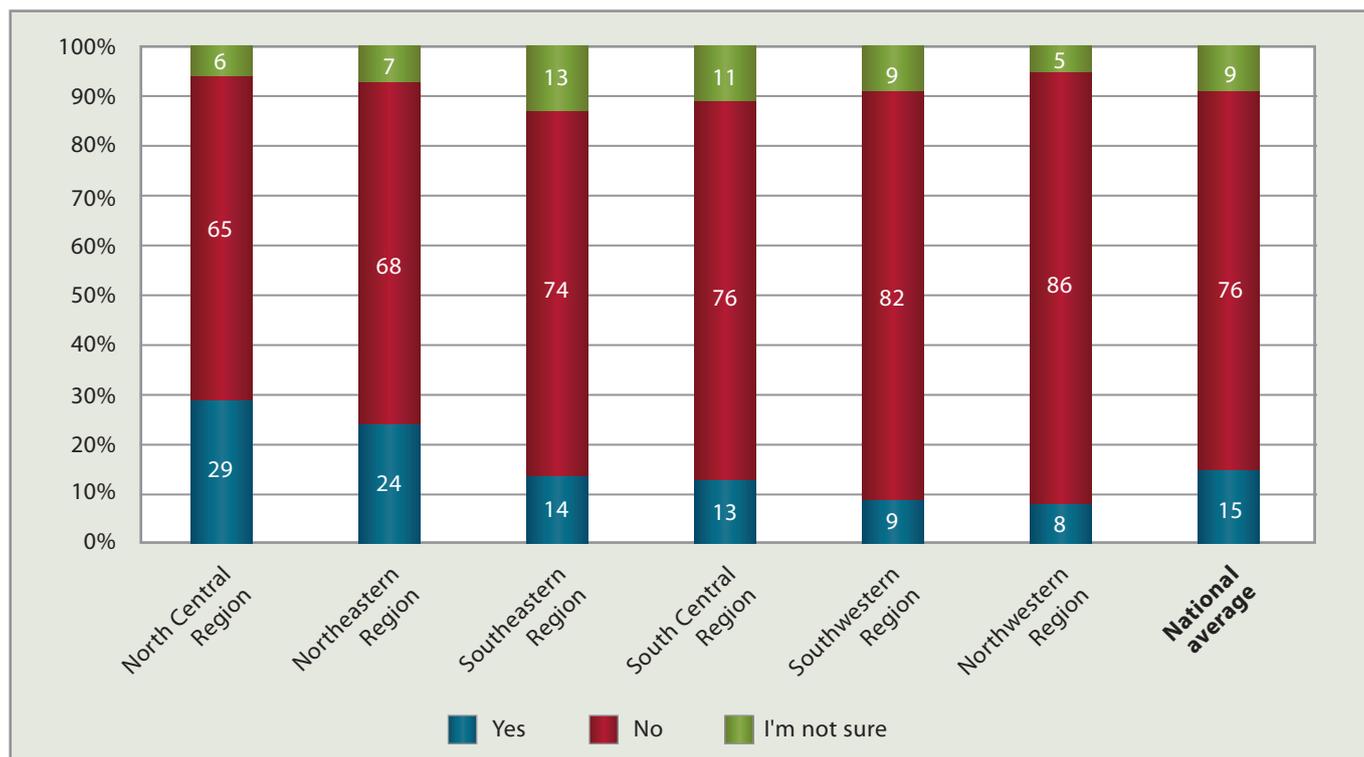
Member States. According to the latest Eurobarometer poll (May 2014) only 18% of Bulgarian citizens have confidence in the national government against an average of 27% for EU Member States. Confidence in the national parliament in Bulgaria is 14% compared to an average of 28% for EU Member States.¹²

The second major aspect on which the attitudes of Bulgarian citizens differ from those of the average EU citizen is that despite the low levels of confidence in parliaments and governments, people in most other EU countries have high confidence in the judicial authorities and the police. In Bulgaria, however, confidence in the Courts and the Prosecution Service is low. This fact was noted in the "State of Society" study in 2008 and has not changed since; hence one can assume that it reflects a well-established attitude.

¹¹ See: Phillips, M. and Simpson, J. (2015), NatCen Social Research, British Social Attitudes 32 – Politics (data are valid as of 2014).

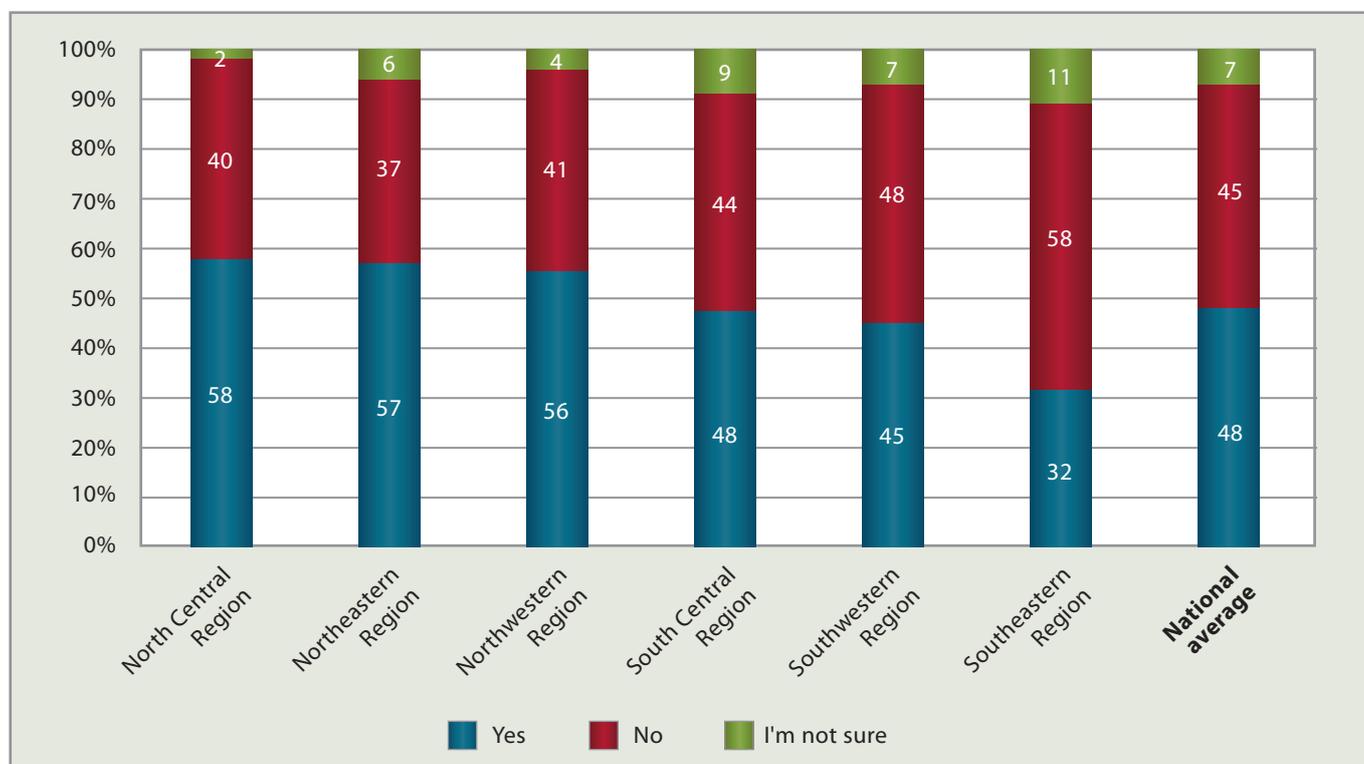
¹² Eurobarometer data as of May 2014 (<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>).

Figure 8. Confidence in Parliament (by place of residence of the respondents)



Question: To what extent do you trust the following institutions/organizations? – Parliament. (“I trust” includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers “I fully trust” and “I rather trust”, while “I don’t trust” includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers “I rather distrust” and “I don’t trust at all”.)

Figure 9. Confidence in the Police (by place of residence of the respondents)

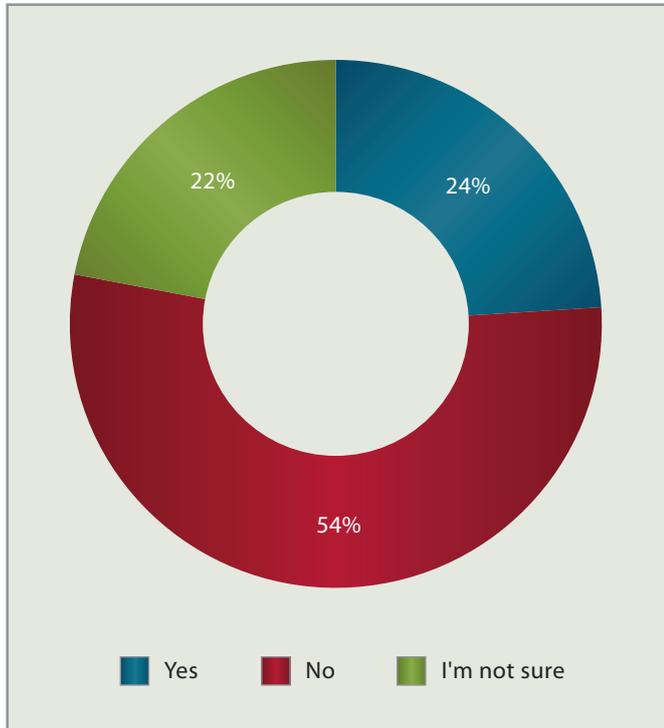


Question: To what extent do you trust the following institutions/organizations? – The Police. (“I trust” includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers “I fully trust” and “I rather trust”, while “I don’t trust” includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers “I rather distrust” and “I don’t trust at all”.)

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN GOVERNANCE

The majority of citizens do not feel represented in the bodies of central and local government. The majority of respondents (54%) do not agree that there is at least one member of Parliament whom they trust and who represents people like them. Only about one-fourth of the respondents agree with this statement (fig. 10). The share of those who are not sure is much higher than the national average (22%) among the residents of Sofia (42% of whom are not sure), among those living in the Southwestern Region (largely dominated by Sofia) and among the residents of the Northwestern Region. Most probably the communication between members of Parliament and their constituencies, and hence the perceived representation, is particularly limited in these two regions.

Figure 10. Confidence in individual members of Parliament

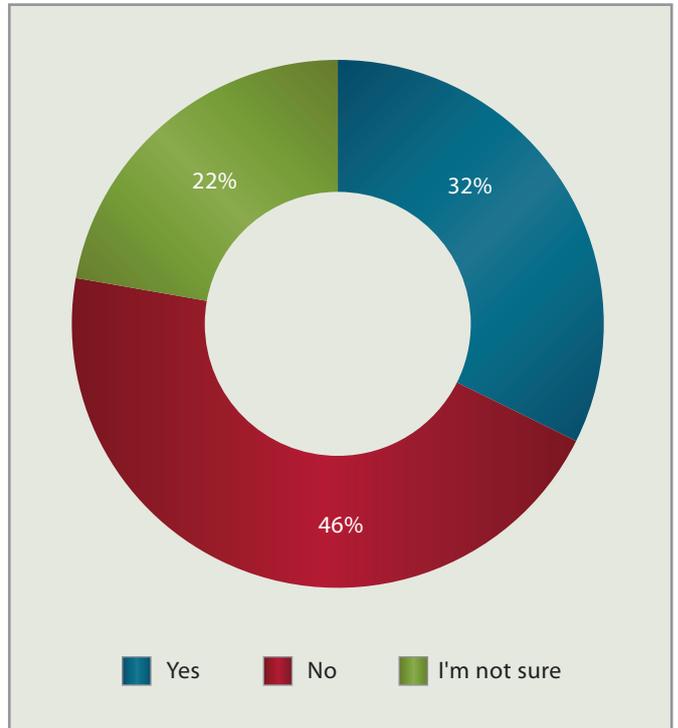


Question: Do you agree with the following statement: "In the National Assembly there is at least one representative from my constituency whom I trust and who I am confident that would defend the interest of people like me and my family"?

People living in the North Central Region are much more likely than the average citizen to agree that there is at least one member of Parliament who represents their interests – 41% of them agree with this statement against a national average of 24%. However, the share of those who disagree is the same as the average for the country; only in the North Central Region 7% of the respondents replied that they were not sure, which suggests that in this region people tend to know their representatives better and have an opinion about them.

At local government level, the relationship of trust and adequate representation between municipal councilors and their constituencies seem to be better established. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) state that they are unable to mention even one municipal councilor whom they trusted to protect their interests but the share of those who replied positively to this question is higher than that for members of Parliament: approximately one third of the respondents would trust at least one municipal councilor in their municipality (fig. 11).

Figure 11. Confidence in individual municipal councilors



Question: Do you agree with the following statement: "In the Municipal Council of my municipality there is at least one councilor whom I trust and who I am confident that would defend the interest of people like me and my family"?

Table 2. Share of persons involved in parties and organizations (%)

Organization	2002	2006	2007	2015
Political party	6.0	5.0	6.0	8.0
Trade union	5.0	5.0	5.0	7.0
Community center	2.0	2.0	3.0	4.0
Sports association/Fishing/Hunting club ¹⁴	0.5	2.0	3.0	3.0
Club	1.0	3.0	3.0	6.0
Non-governmental organization	1.0	0.5	1.0	3.0
Professional/business organization	0.5	1.0	1.0	2.0
Other	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.4
I am not a member in any organization	85.0	84.0	81.0	81.0

Question: *Are you a member in any of the following organizations?*

The vast majority of respondents (81%) are not involved in a political party or a civil society organization. Less than one fifth of the respondents (19%) are affiliated with any organization, while only about 8% are members of political parties. The highest share of uninvolved citizens was registered in the Northeastern Region: 88% against a national average of 81%. This share is also higher than the average for the country among the respondents who live in rural areas: 86% of them are not affiliated with any organization. People with low level of education, unemployed people, and respondents who identify themselves as Turks or Roma also tend to be significantly less involved in organized public life. Among the respondents who identify as Roma, the share of those who are not affiliated with any organization is 96%, while among those who identify themselves as Turks it is 91%.

The 2015 survey registered a slight increase in citizens' involvement in political parties and civil society organizations compared to previous studies, the latest of which was conducted in 2007.¹³ The share of respondents who are not affiliated with any organization decreased by 3%, while the share of those involved in clubs increased from 3% to 6%. The increase in the involvement in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is minimal.

Approximately 15% of the respondents are involved in at least one organization, while 3% to 4% are involved in more than one organization. The majority

of those who are affiliated with political parties or civil society organizations feel that their opinion matters for the leadership of the party or the organization they are involved with. About 58% of those affiliated with political parties share this perception, while among those who are involved in other organizations, this share is 62%.

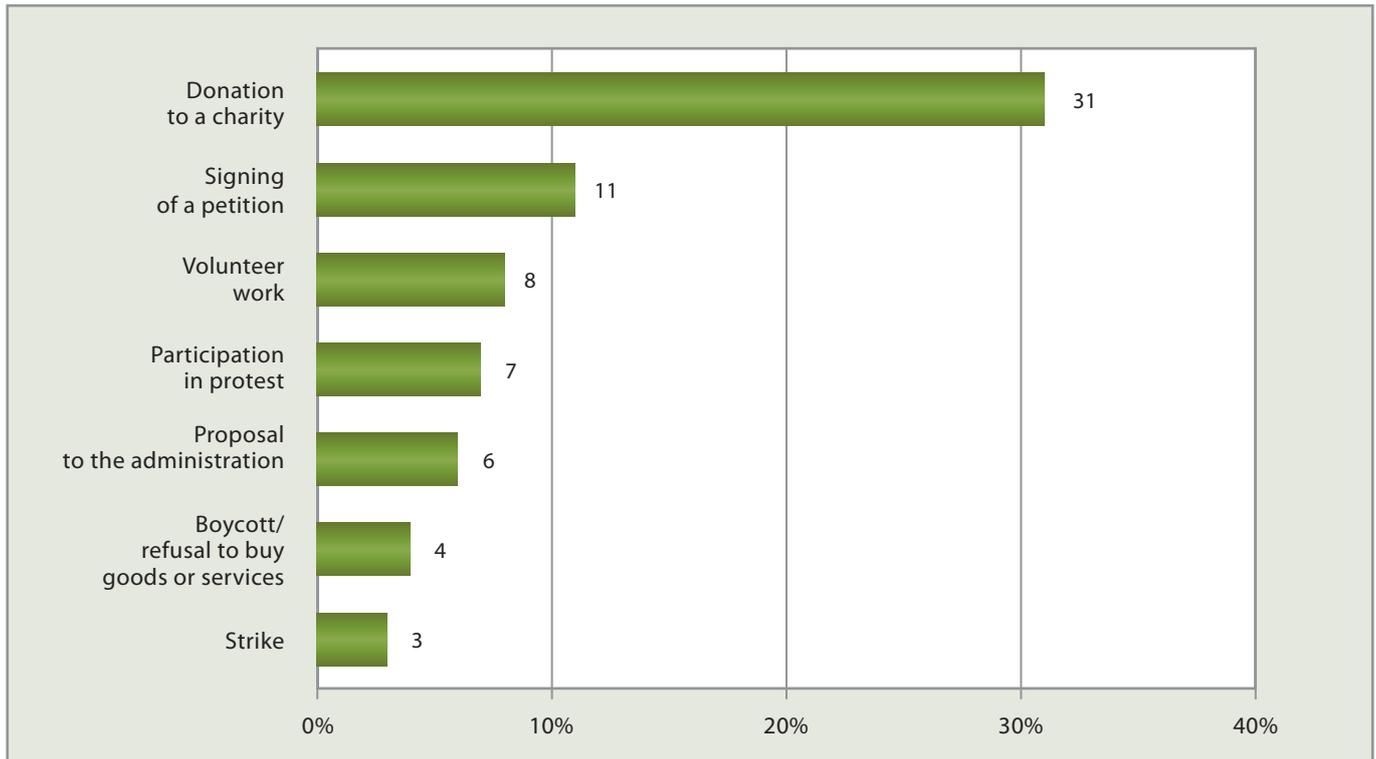
Participation in elections is the main form of citizen participation in governance. The majority of respondents reported that they have participated in the last parliamentary elections. About 28% of the respondents did not vote, mainly because they did not approve of any party on the ballot. About 16% of the non-voters (or 5% of all respondents) say they do not vote as matter of principle.

The second most popular form of civic participation in political life, after voting, is the signing of petitions. Every tenth respondent reported that they had signed petitions in the last 12 months. Only 7% of the respondents have participated in some type of protest, while 6% have made proposals to the state or municipal administration. The share of those who have signed petitions is higher than the average for the country among the residents of Sofia, almost 20% of whom reported having signed petitions in the last 12 months. People with university or college education also tend to sign petitions more often than the average citizen. In terms of age, most active in petition signing are the people aged 30 to 44 years, while men seem to be slightly more active than women: 13% of the men and 9% of the women reported having signed petitions against a national

¹³ Open Society Institute – Sofia, *State of Society 2008*, p. 248.

¹⁴ This option was not included in the questionnaire of the "State of Society" survey in 2002 and 2006; it was added for the first time in 2007.

Figure 12. Forms of civic participation



Question: *In the last 12 months, did you happen to participate in... (answers for each option separately)? (Share of respondents who have replied "Yes".)*

average of 11%. On the other hand, petition signing is less popular among people living in small towns and villages, among elderly citizens (above 65 years of age) and among respondents with lower level of education.

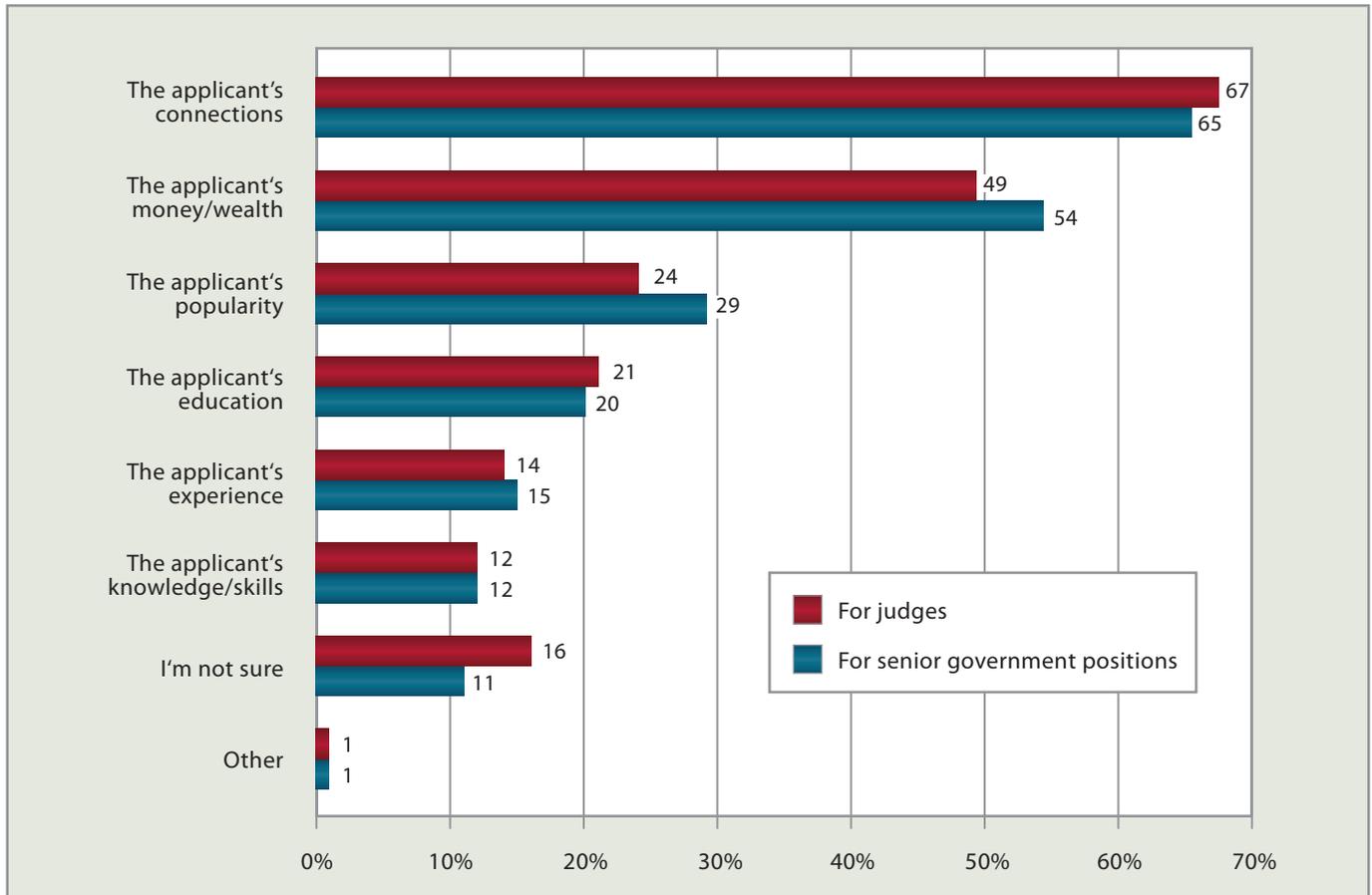
The weak involvement of citizens in governance can hardly be explained with excessive selfishness or lack of interest in public affairs. Nearly one-third or 31% of the respondents said that in the last 12 months they had made donations to charitable causes, while 8% reported they had worked as volunteers, which suggests that there is a certain degree of social empathy (fig. 12). A more likely explanation for the low civic participation are the underdeveloped forms of association outside major cities and the lack of administrative mechanisms to allow inclusion of citizens in governance beyond voting in elections.

Access to public service is not usually considered in literature as a form of citizen participation in governance but public attitudes on this issue give an idea of how the government elite in the country is formed. Hence public perceptions of the access to civil service is one possible explanation for the low confidence in institutions and the low level of participation in initiatives seeking change in public policies.

The dominant opinion among respondents is that the main factors for access to senior government positions in Bulgaria were the applicant’s personal connections and money/wealth. The educational background, experience, knowledge or skills of the applicant are identified as factors for access to public service by approximately one fifth of the respondents or less. The opinion of public servants who are expected to have immediate experience with the employment process, does not differ from the opinion of the other respondents.

In the public perception, the educational background, experience, knowledge or skills of the applicant are far less important for securing a senior government position than the applicant’s personal connections and wealth. The consequences from this belief can be sought in two directions: on the one hand, the lack of professionalism in high-level civil service is the rule rather than the exception and this is one possible explanation for clientelism and low efficiency of institutions. On the other hand, access to senior government positions is yet another means for the exclusion of entire categories of citizens (poor and without appropriate connections) from governance and one of the possible explanations for the low pub-

Figure 13. Main factors for access to senior government positions



Question: Which of the following factors have greater importance in the appointment of people to senior government positions? Compared to the question: Which of the following factors have greater importance in the appointment of judges?

lic confidence in the bodies of representative democracy. It is important to note that despite the formal separation of the judiciary from the other branches of government, there is no difference in the way respondents rank the factors determining the access to high-ranking government positions and the factors determining the access to a judgeship. According to the majority of respondents, the applicant's personal connections, wealth and popularity are far more important than educational background, experience, knowledge or skills both in securing a senior government position and in becoming a judge (fig. 13).

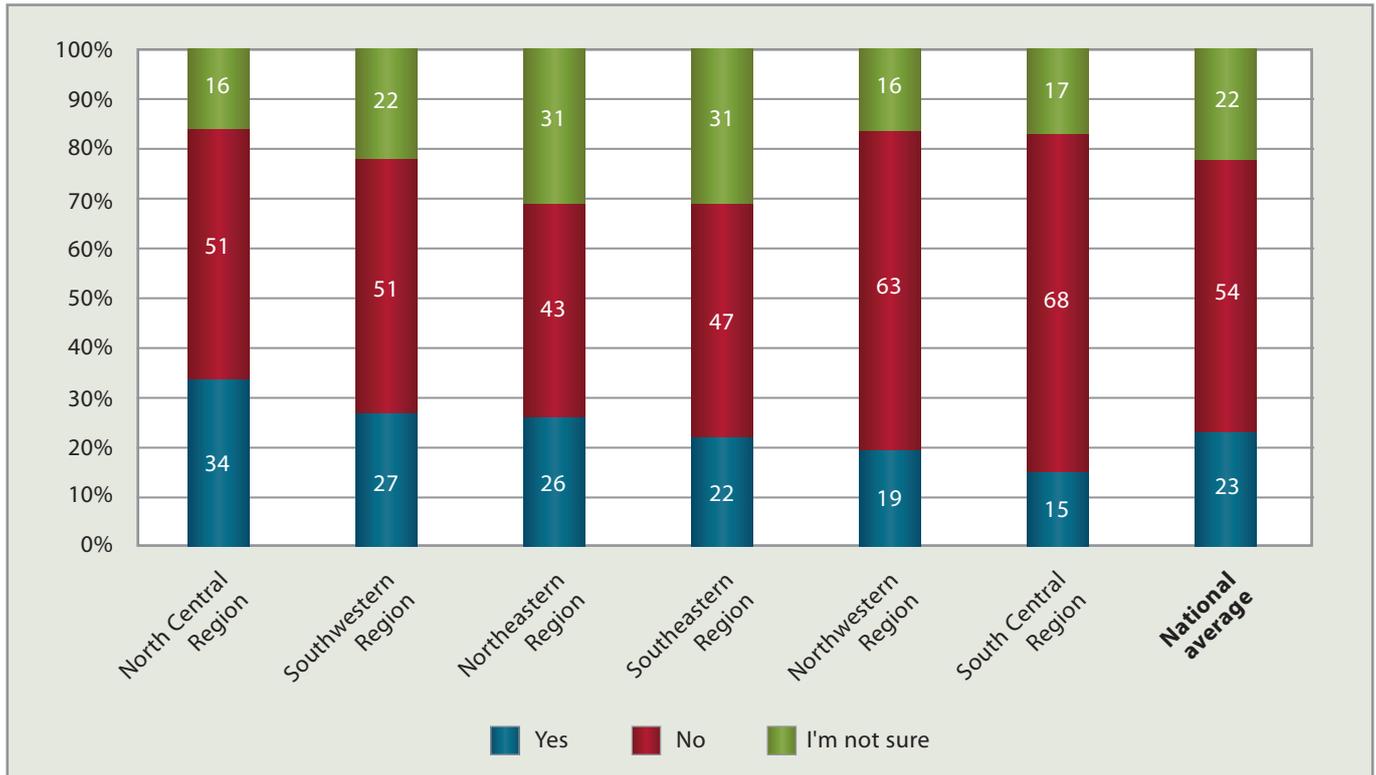
PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTIES

According to the Encyclopædia Britannica definition of democracy cited above, the difference between liberal democracy and the "people's" democra-

cies of the former socialist bloc countries is not only the existence of many different parties but also the change of government in competition among them. Precisely the competition among political parties and the change in public policies reflecting a change of political parties in government seems to be problematic in Bulgaria, judging by the public perceptions registered in the survey.

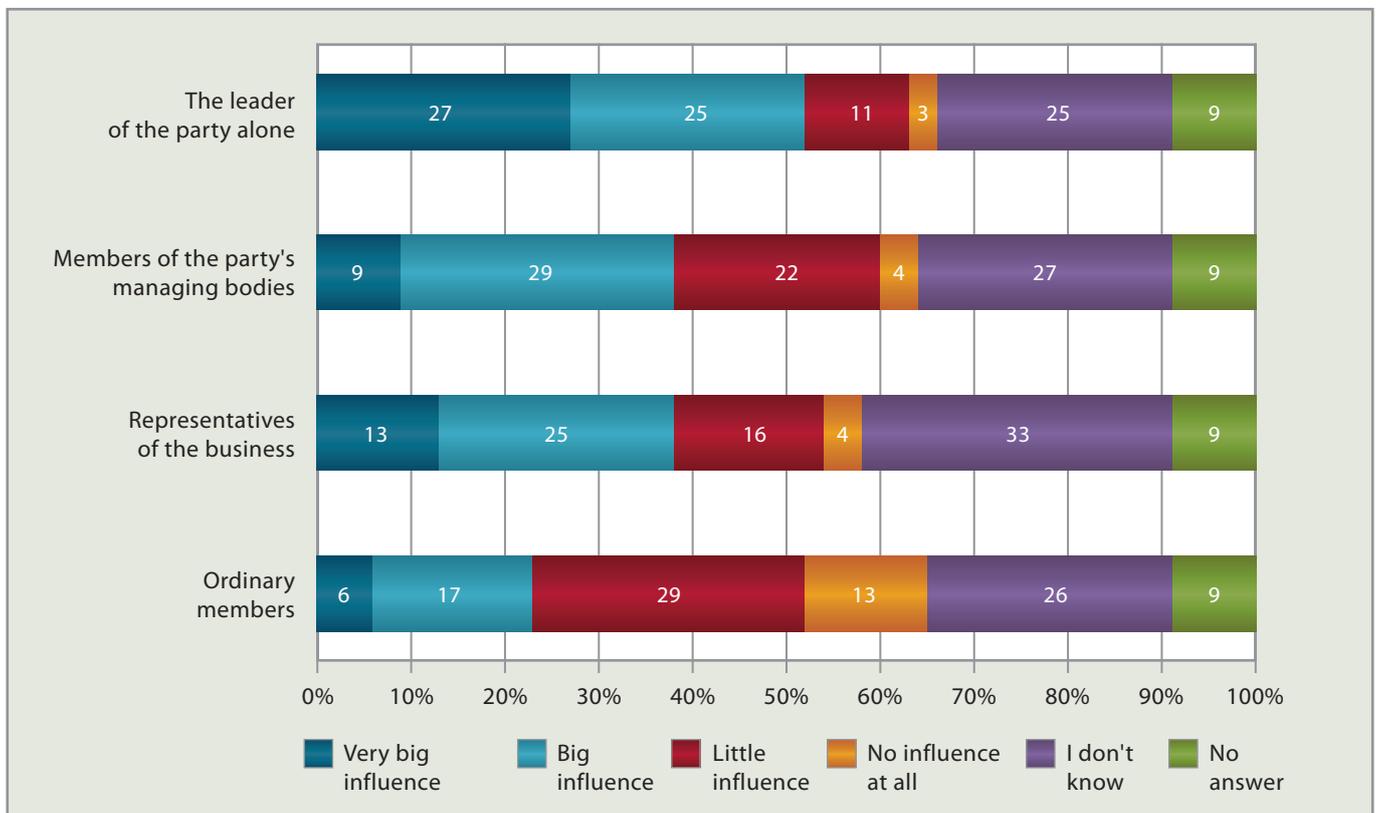
According to the majority of respondents (54%), a change of parties in government does not lead to actual changes in the overall government policy. The respondents who live in the South Central Region and the Northwestern Region are particularly confident that this is the case: 68% and 63% of them, respectively, see no change in policy after a change of government, compared to a national average of 54%. This opinion is also shared by those who live in district towns (61% against an average of 54% for the country), as well as by better educated people. Only respondents who live in the North Central Region are

Figure 14. Competition among the parties (by place of residence of the respondents)



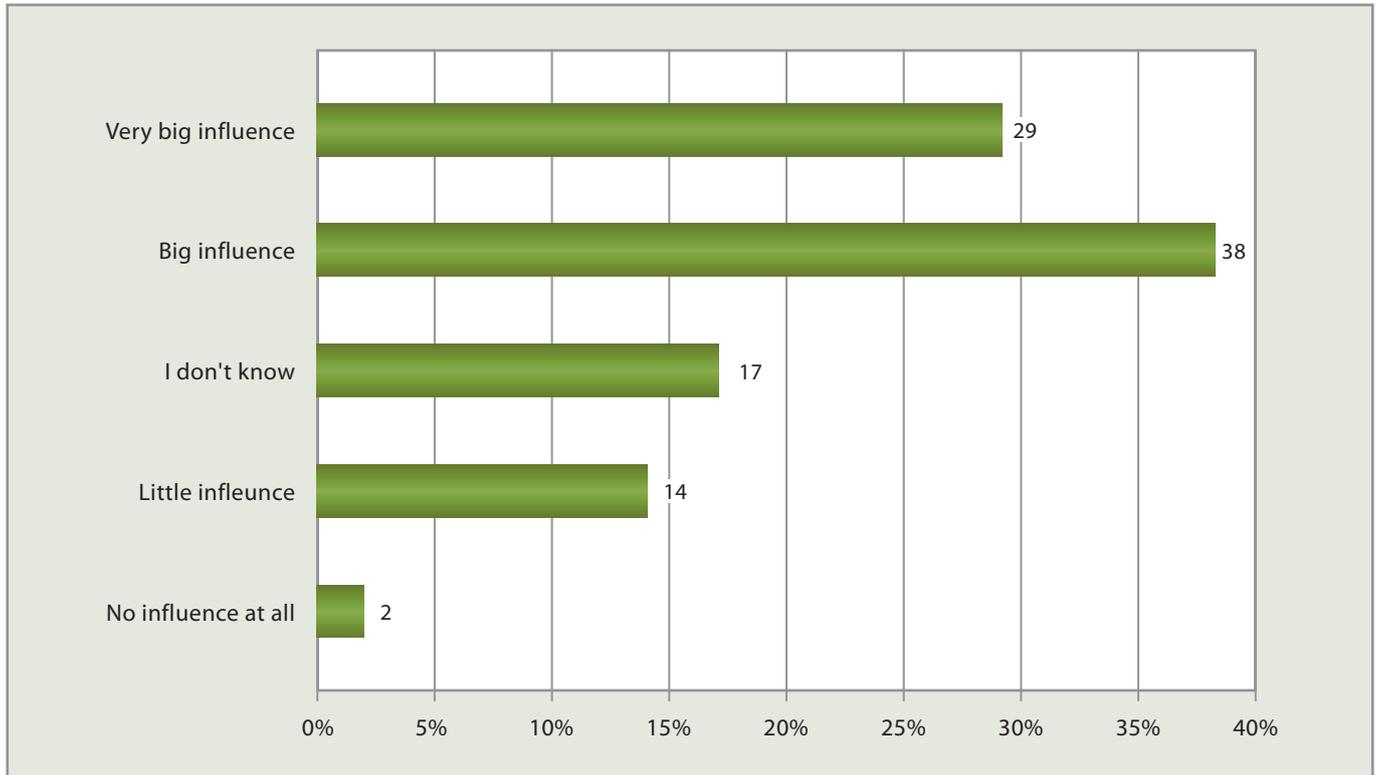
Question: Do you think that the change of parties in government leads to actual changes in the overall government policy?

Figure 15. Decision making in political parties



Question: In your opinion, what influence do each of the following have on the decision making in the party you voted for in the last parliamentary elections?

Figure 16. Perceived influence of organized crime on political parties



Question: Do you believe that organized crime influences some of the major political parties in Bulgaria?

more likely to see a change in policy after a change of government: approximately one third of them (34%) gave a positive answer to this question (fig. 14).

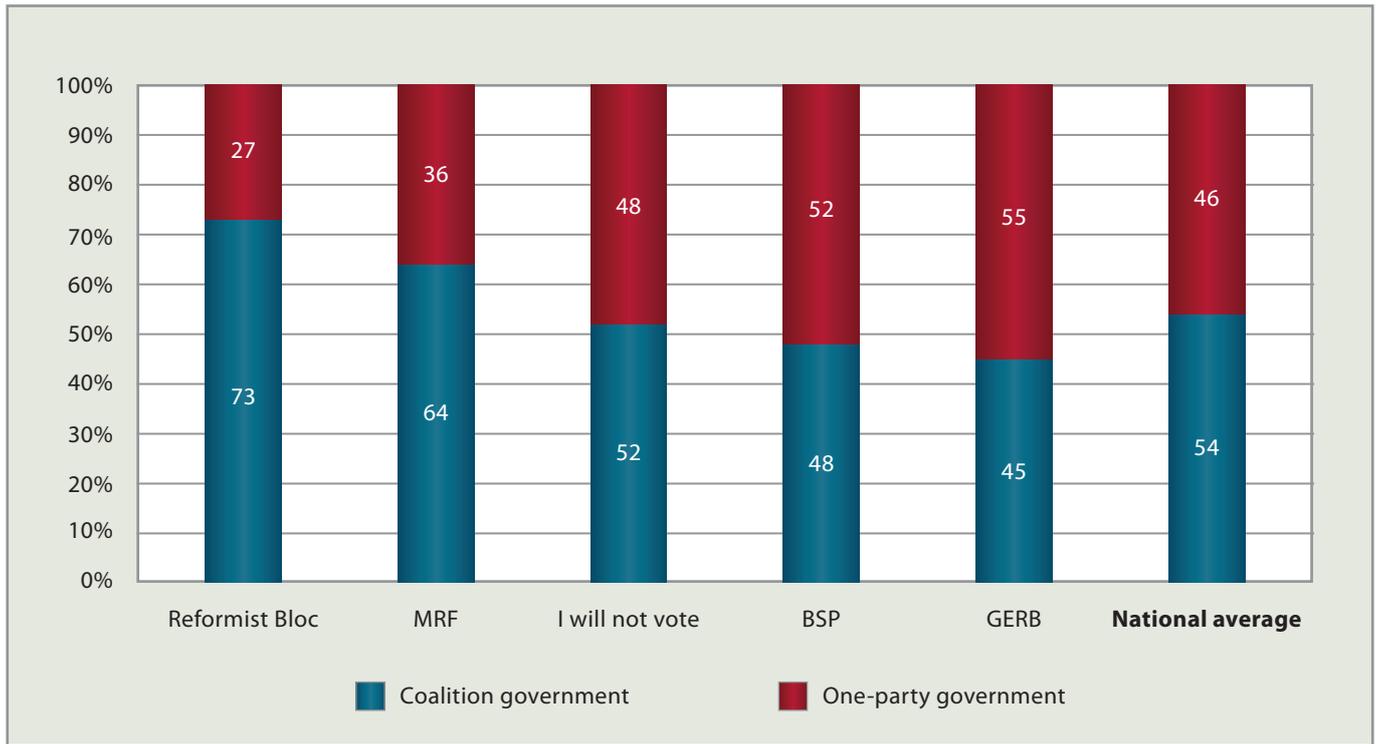
Citizens vote in elections without knowing much about the factors that affect the leadership of the party they vote for. Between one third and one fourth of the respondents are not sure what influence the members and the chairperson of the party which they voted for in the last elections, have on the party's leadership. The information on the decision-making process in major political parties that is available to voters leaves them with the impression that the members of a party are the least important factor in making decisions about the party's leadership and that decisions are at the sole discretion of the chairperson. Only about one fourth of the respondents believe that the members of a party have influence over the party's leadership but their influence is less important than the influence representatives of the business exercise over decision-making in a party (fig. 15). Ignorance or frustration with the way political parties are managed, as well as doubts about the factors that influence decision-making is probably yet another rea-

son, which further discourages citizens' involvement in politics.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (67%) believe that organized crime influences some of the main political parties in the country: 29% believe that this influence is very big, while 38% believe that organized crime has a big influence on the leadership of some of the major parties. The perception that organized crime influences political parties is more prevalent among those living in the Southeastern Region (77% against a national average of 67%) and among those living in district towns (73% compared to 67% nationwide). Only 16% of the respondents believe that organized crime has little or no influence on some of the major political parties (fig. 16).

For Western European democracies, the second half of the 20th century was a period of increased frequency of coalition governments at the expense of a decline in one-party governments that were typical for the 19th century when parliamentary democracy was established. Between 1945 and 1999 there was an increase in the number of democratic countries, which most of the time were run by coalition governments.

Figure 17. Coalition vs. one-party government (by respondents' electoral preferences)



Question: In your opinion, what would be better for Bulgaria? To be run by a coalition government? To be run by a one-party government?

This came as a result of electoral system reforms towards greater proportional representation.¹⁵ In this period only three Western European countries – Great Britain, Spain and Greece – had no experience with coalition governments. At the same time, countries such as Austria, Italy, Germany or France have been run by coalition governments for most of the second half of the 20th century, while in the Netherlands and in Luxembourg none of the governments were based on the one-party model.

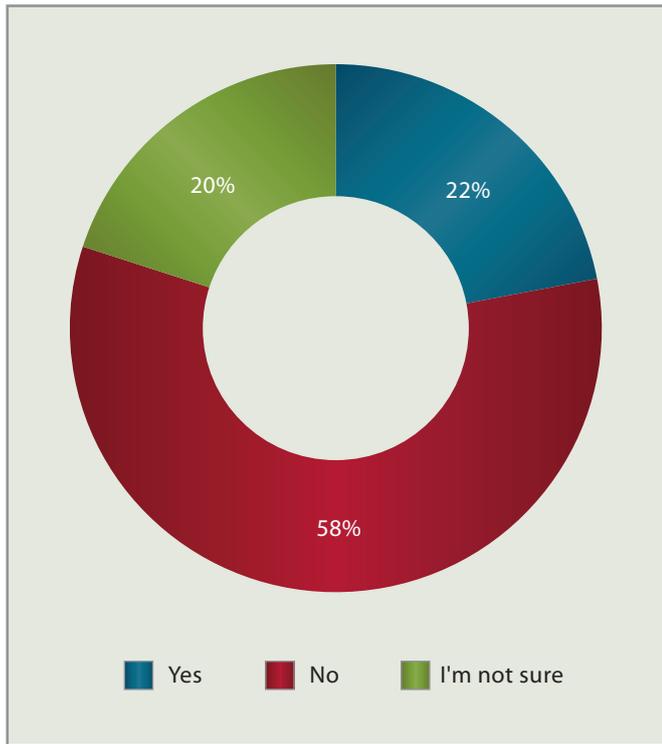
The majority of Bulgarian citizens (54%) believe that it is better for Bulgaria to be run by a coalition government, while 46% think that the country would benefit more from a one-party government. People who tend to vote for smaller parties strongly support the coalition form of government – 73% of those who voted for the Reformist Bloc and 64% of the MRF voters express this opinion, against a national average of 54%. Although GERB is currently the leading party

in a coalition government, its supporters clearly prefer one-party government (55% of them believe it is better for the country to be run by a one-party government, while 45% support a coalition government). Among those who vote for BSP, the supporters of one-party government (52%) also have a slight, albeit less pronounced, lead over those who favor coalition government (48%) (fig. 17).

There is no doubt that public perceptions are influenced by the current situation and a certain share of people who said that a coalition governments was better for Bulgaria, actually expressed support for the current coalition government. Nevertheless, the results of the survey hint at a paradox of the Bulgarian democratic transition: on the one hand, because of the legacy of one-party rule, one-party governments are not perceived as good for the country, while on the other hand, they are important for the realization of the democratic project since they provide better guarantees for government accountability than coalition governments in which responsibility is blurred.

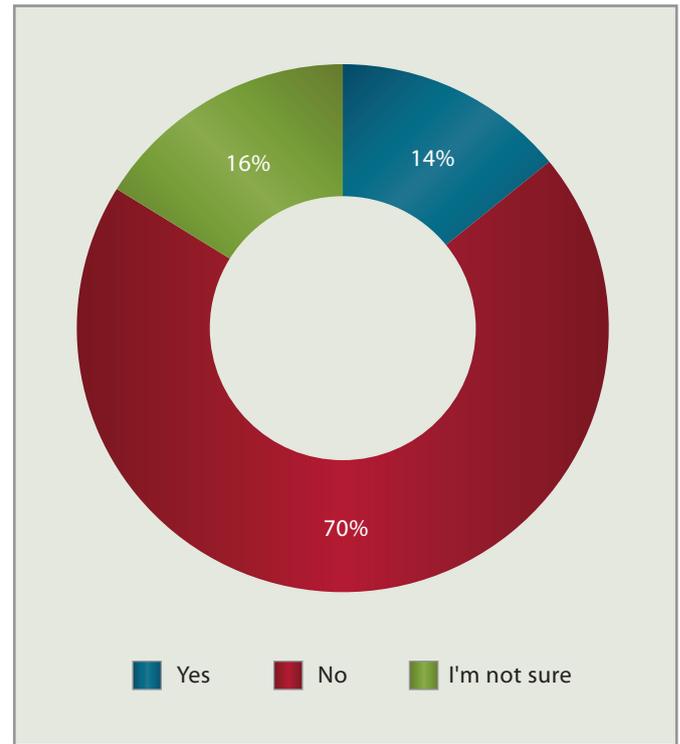
¹⁵ Quoted in: Müller, W., Strom, K. (eds.) (2003), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press, p. 2-3.

Figure 18. Are the laws fair?



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "The laws in Bulgaria are fair"?*

Figure 19. Are the laws clear and comprehensible?



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "The laws in Bulgaria are clear and comprehensible to citizens"?*

THE RULE OF LAW

If the ultimate goal of democratic governance is to ensure accountability of the government, then the procedures and institutions involved in the adoption and implementation of laws are essential to its success.

And yet, asked whether the laws in Bulgaria are fair, the majority of respondents (58%) disagreed, only 22% agreed, and one in five said that they were not sure (fig. 18). The residents of the North Central Region are more likely to agree with this statement: 36% believe that the laws are fair compared to an average of 22% for the country. In this region, the share of those who are not sure is also the lowest – only 7% against a national average of 20%. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the residents of the Southeastern Region: 67% of them feel that the laws are not fair (the average being 58%), while only 15% believe that the laws are fair (against an average of 22% for the country). The latter is comparable to the results registered in the Northwestern Region where only 16% of the respondents believe that the laws are fair.

People in public service are more likely than the average citizen to uphold the fairness of the laws: 30% of them agree with this statement (compared to 22% nationwide), while 52% disagree (against an average of 58%). Interestingly, 18% of the people in public service said that they were not sure, which is comparable to the national average.

The share of those who disagree with the statement that the laws are clear and comprehensible to citizens is even greater (nearly 70%). Only 14% agree with this statement, while 16% are not sure (fig. 19). The prevalence of those who disagree is greatest among the respondents who live in district towns and among the residents of the North Central Region: three fourths of them (75%) feel that the laws are not clear and comprehensible to the citizens. The results are comparable also among better educated respondents and among people in public service who should have immediate experience with the application of laws.

Access to the Internet does not really facilitate citizens' access to the texts of the applicable laws. Bulgaria is one of the few countries in the EU that does

not support an internet free database with the latest version of its legislation, while individual government institutions, though obliged to publish the texts of the laws relevant to their activity, do not always maintain a complete and updated collection on their websites.

More than 70% the people who surf the web daily disagree with the statement that the laws are clear and comprehensible to citizens, while among those who do not use the Internet, this share is 67%, which suggests that access to the Internet makes no significant difference in the way laws are perceived.

Of all the issues related to the rule of law in Bulgaria, the most serious one is the equality of citizens before the law. A significant majority (77%) of respondents disagree with the statement that laws in the country apply equally to all. Only 9% agree with this statement, while 14% are not sure (fig. 20). The perception that laws do not apply equally to all is more dominant among the people with university and college education (84%) and among more affluent people (with monthly income per household member above 567 BGN). The majority of people with lower income and level of education also feel that citizens are not equal before the law but the share of those among them who are not sure is much higher – 37% among

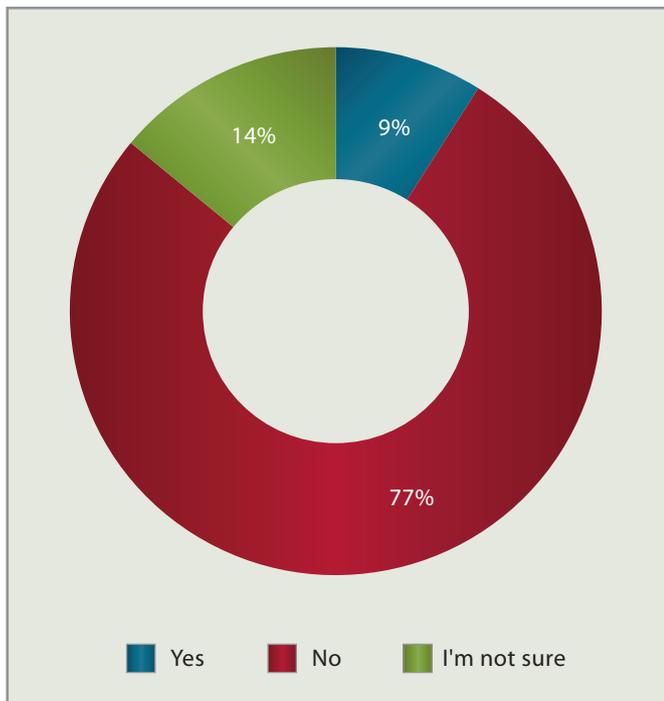
the respondents with primary and lower than primary education, for instance.

A slightly higher share of people who believe that laws apply equally to all was registered only among respondents who live in the North Central Region: 20% of them, or one in five, tend to agree that citizens are equal before the law against a national average of 9%. However, the share of respondents from this region who disagree with this statement is the same as the average for the country, with only 2% of them stating that they are not sure.

Interestingly, the attitude of people in public service does not differ much from that of the other respondents. Quite the opposite, the negative perceptions among them are even stronger than the average: 81% of the people in public service disagree with the statement that laws in the country apply equally to all.

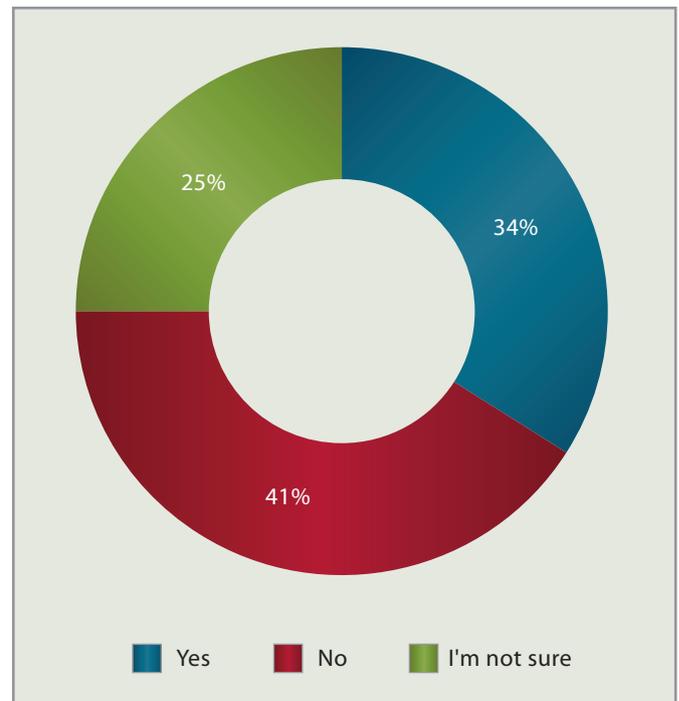
The respondents' electoral preferences to some extent influence the way they perceive the laws. On all three questions related to the quality of legislation, the opinion expressed by the supporters of BSP tends to be much more negative than that of the voters of other major political parties. BSP supporters are more likely to believe that the laws in the country are not fair (66% negative response against a national average

Figure 20. Do laws apply equally to all?



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "The laws in Bulgaria apply equally to all"?*

Figure 21. The government acts within the law



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "The government of Bulgaria acts within the law"?*

of 58%), that the laws are not clear and comprehensible (79% negative response against a national average of 69%), and that laws do not apply equally to all (85% negative response against a national average of 77%). Equality before the law and access to justice are natural topics for the left political space and it is surprising that these public attitudes so far have not been translated into specific public policies for improving the quality of legislation.

Most respondents (41%) disagree with the statement that the government in Bulgaria is acting within the law (the share of those who disagree is 34%, while those who have replied that they were not sure are 25%) (fig. 21). The negative opinion is most widespread among young people (under the age of 29) and among respondents who identify themselves as Turks, reaching exactly 50% of the respondents in both groups.

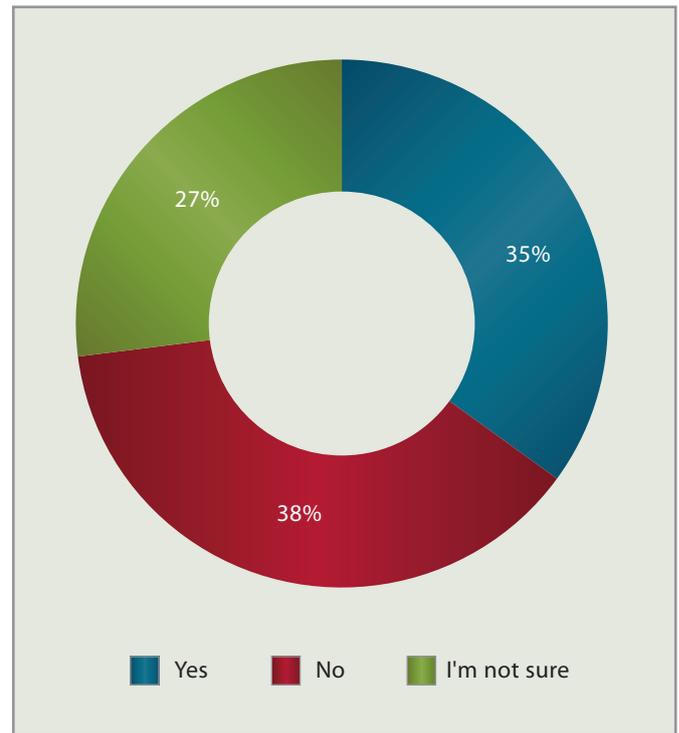
The share of respondents who agree that the government is acting within the law is higher than the share of those who disagree among the residents of the North Central Region (49% agree; 37% disagree), among public sector employees (45% agree; 36% disagree), and among the residents of Sofia (40% agree; 31% disagree).

Opinions as to whether the courts could prevent the government from violating the law are somewhat divided: 38% of the respondents disagree with this statement, 35% believe that the courts can prevent the government from violating the law, while a considerable share of respondents (27%) are not sure (fig. 22). More pronounced majorities of people who feel that the courts cannot prevent the government from violating the law were registered in the Southeastern Region and the Northwestern Region – 44% and 43%, respectively, against a national average of 38%.

The opinion that the courts can prevent the government from violating the law is more widespread among the residents of Sofia and among the people living in the North Central Region – 48% of them agree with his statement compared to an average of 35% for the country. Almost half of the people in public service (48%) also tend to trust the ability of the courts to prevent the government from violating the law.

The share of respondents who chose the option “I’m not sure” is high on almost all questions related to the quality of legislation and the access to justice and there are also significant regional differences in

Figure 22. Courts restrain the government



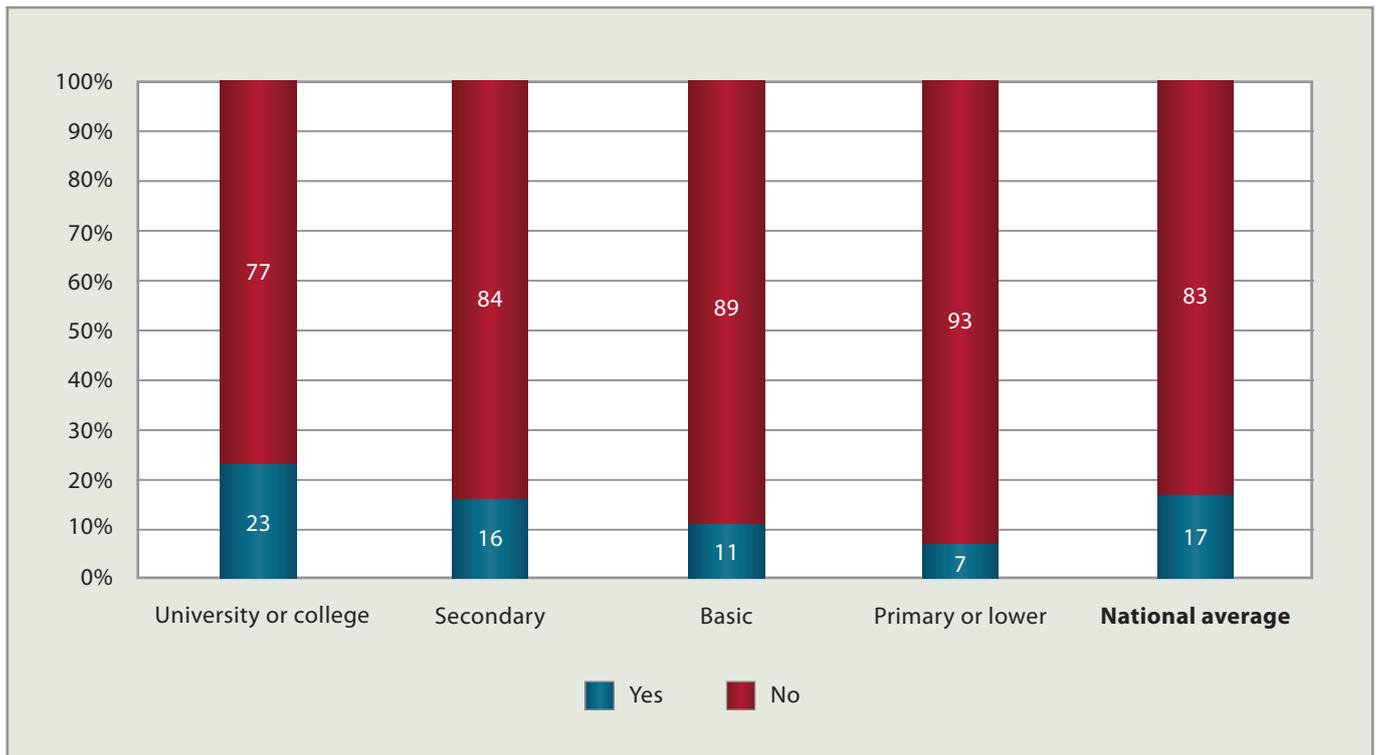
Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: “Courts can prevent the government from violating the law”?*

this respect. One possible explanation for this is that the laws and the courts actually have a marginal role in the lives of the majority of respondents. Over the past 12 months, 83% of the respondents have not entered a court building, while those who have entered in the majority of cases did so in order to obtain a copy of a document. The share of those who have entered a court building in the past 12 months is smaller than the average for the country among the residents of Sofia and among respondents who live in rural areas (13% and 12%, respectively), while among the residents of district towns this share is 23% against a national average of 17%.

There are also other important regional differences in the access to justice: 23% of the respondents who live in the North Central Region have entered a court building in the past 12 months, while in the Northwestern Region this share is only 5%.

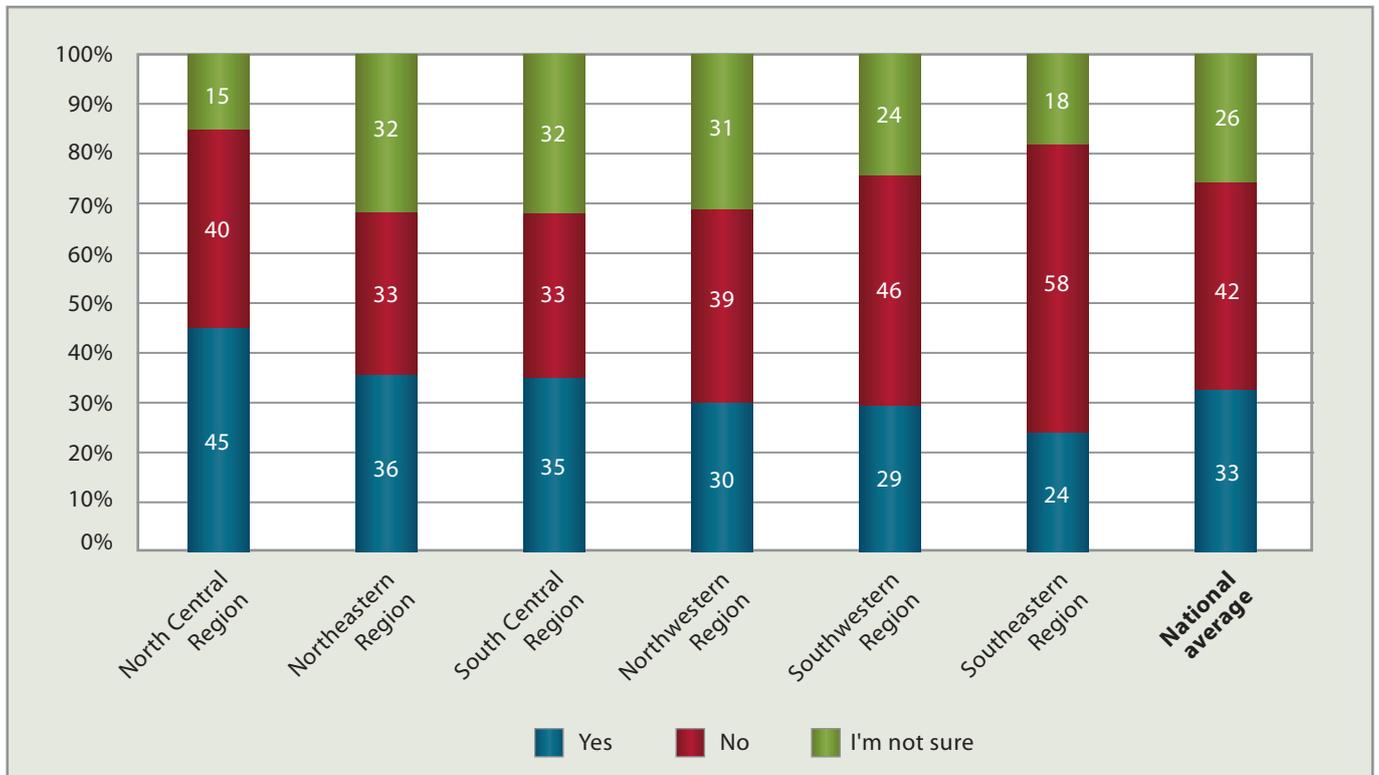
Responses are also influenced by the respondents’ level of education: 23% of the people with university or college education have entered a court building in the past 12 months compared to 16% of the people with secondary education, 11% of the people with ba-

Figure 23. Personal experience with the courts according to the educational level of respondents



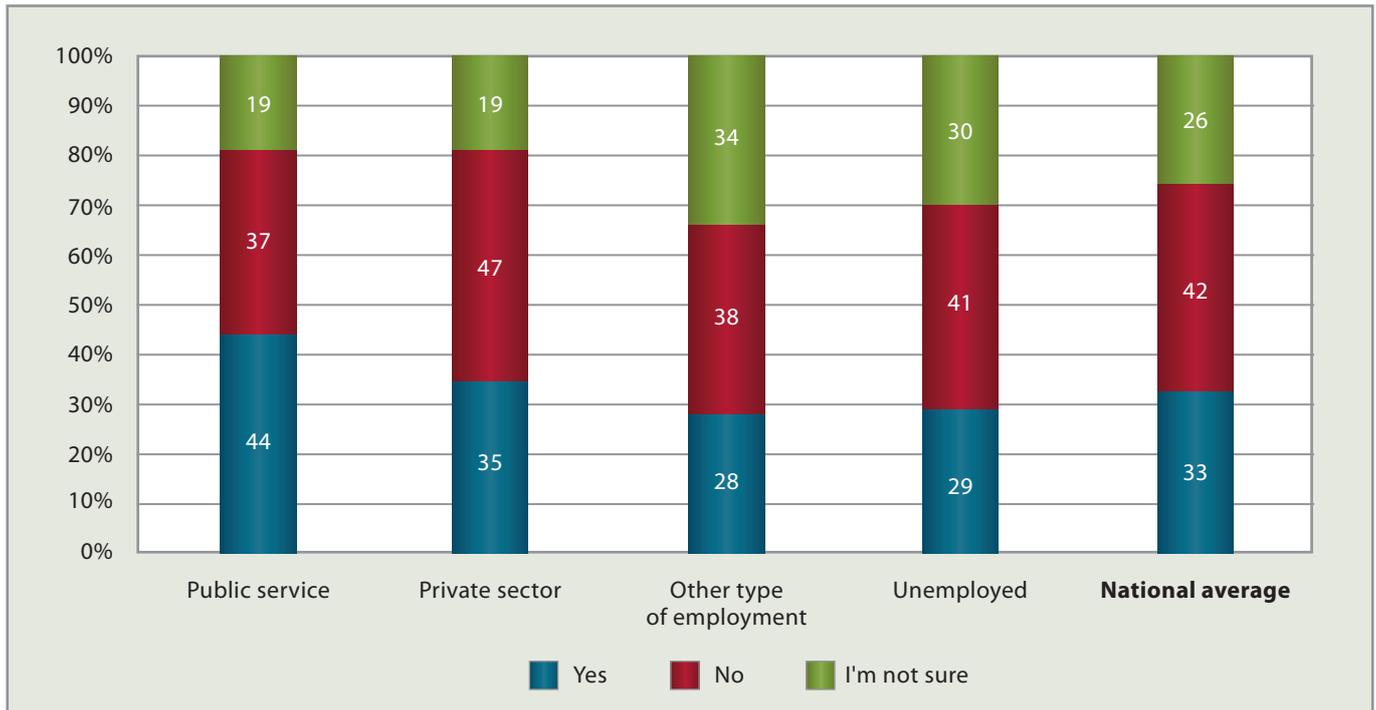
Question: *In the last 12 months have you happened to enter into a court building?*

Figure 24. Expectations of a fair trial (by place of residence of the respondents)



Question: *If you had to go to court, do you believe that you would receive a fair trial? ("Yes" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Definitely yes" and "Rather yes", while "No" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Definitely no" and "Rather no".)*

Figure 25. Expectations of a fair trial according to the occupation of the respondents



Question: *If you had to go to court, do you believe that you would receive a fair trial? ("Yes" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Definitely yes" and "Rather yes", while "No" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Definitely no" and "Rather no".)*

sic education, and 7% of the people with primary and lower than primary education (fig. 23). Most probably economically active citizens have interactions with the court more often because they need copies of different court documents more frequently.

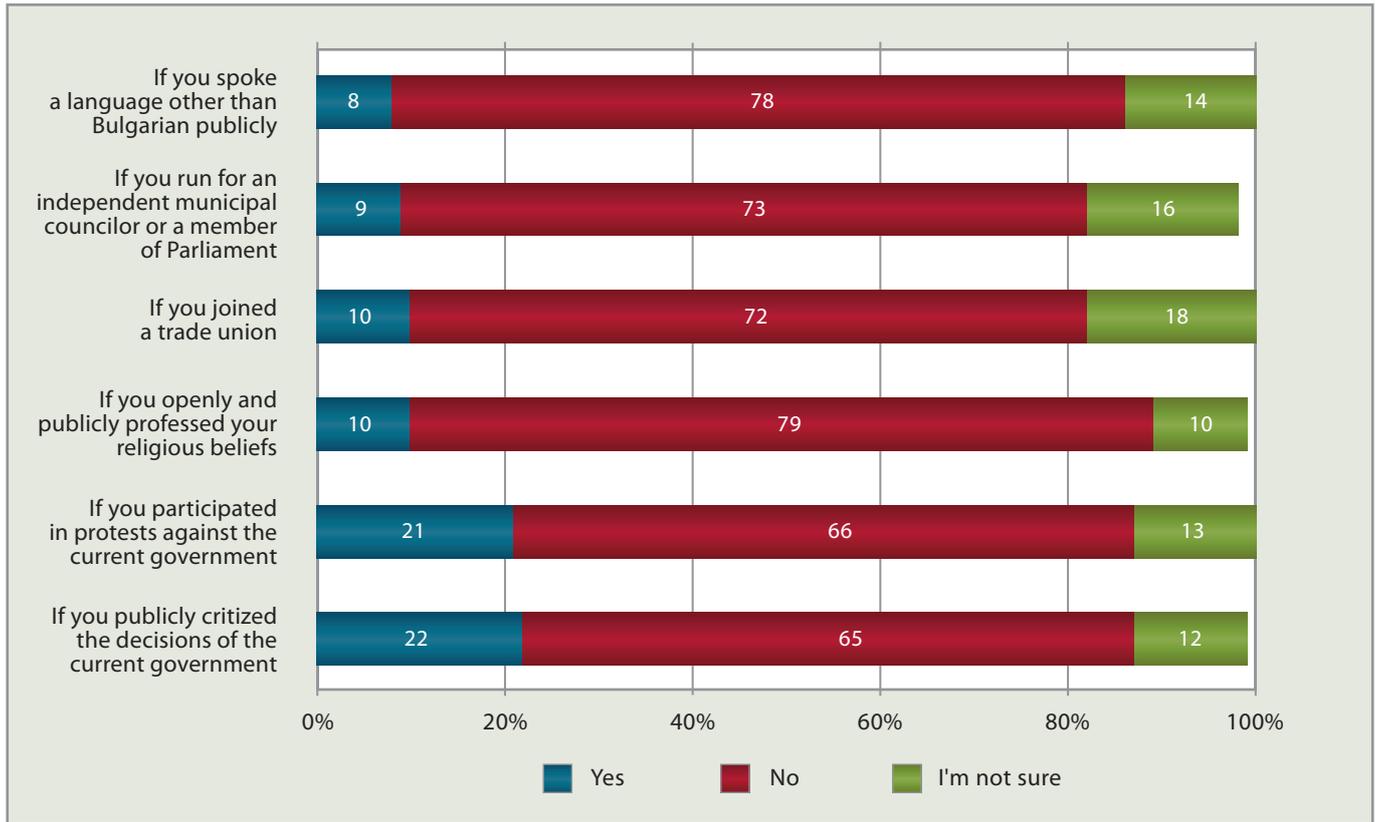
Obtaining copies of documents is the main reason for interacting with courts: 68% of those who have entered a court building in the last 12 months, have done so to obtain some document. Around one fifth (18%) of those who have been to court, have appeared as witnesses while 15% have been a party in a lawsuit. In the last 12 months only one respondent has been involved in court proceedings as a juror, while 2.6% of the respondents who have been to court, have provided court expert services. In theory, the institution of trial by a jury of peers (jurors) has been established to ensure civic participation in the administration of justice but the findings suggest that it does not achieve this goal.

Most people tend to believe that if they had to go to court, they would not receive a fair trial: 42% of the respondents replied "rather no" or "definitely no" while 33% answered "rather yes" or "definitely yes". Only 3% of the respondents are confident that they would receive a fair trial, if they went to court. The share of

citizens who believe they would receive a fair trial prevails among the residents of the North Central Region: 45% of them replied "rather yes" or "definitely yes" against 40% who were not confident that they would receive a fair trial or were convinced that they would not. In the North Central Region, the share of respondents who were not sure is the lowest in the country – 15% against a national average of 26%. Expectations of a fair trial are weakest among the people living in the Southeastern Region: 58% of them are doubtful, having replied "rather no" or "definitely no", compared to an average of 42% for the country, while only 24% of the respondents from this region have more or less positive expectations against a national average of 33% (fig. 24).

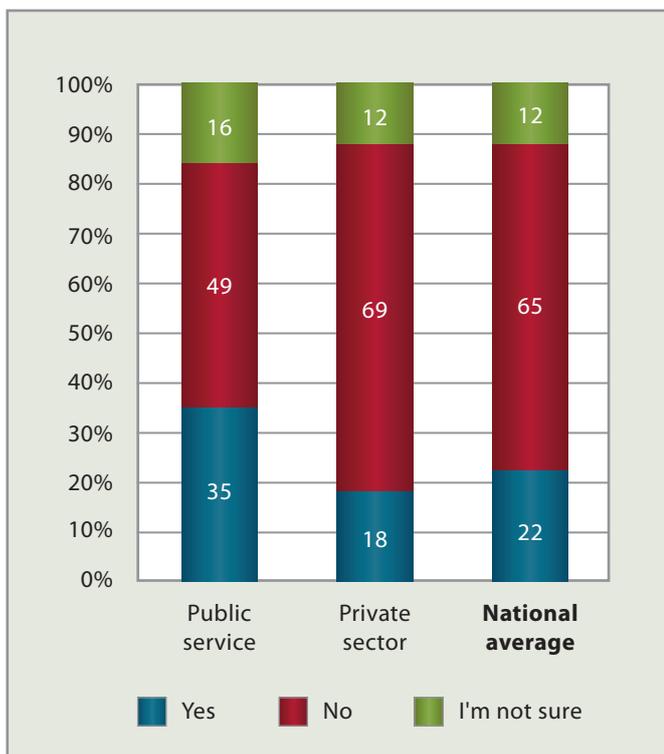
Some notable differences in the expectations of a fair trial can be also identified depending on the respondents' employment status. The share of those who believe that they would receive a fair trial is higher among the respondents in public service than among private sector employees or unemployed persons. However, between one fifth and one fourth of public servants replied that they were not sure whether they would receive a fair trial (fig. 25).

Figure 26. Risk of wrongful dismissal



Question: *How likely it is for you to lose your job/business if... (answers for each option separately)? ("Yes" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Highly likely" and "Rather likely", while "No" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Rather unlikely" and "Highly unlikely".)*

Figure 27. Risk of wrongful dismissal according to the sector of occupation of the respondents

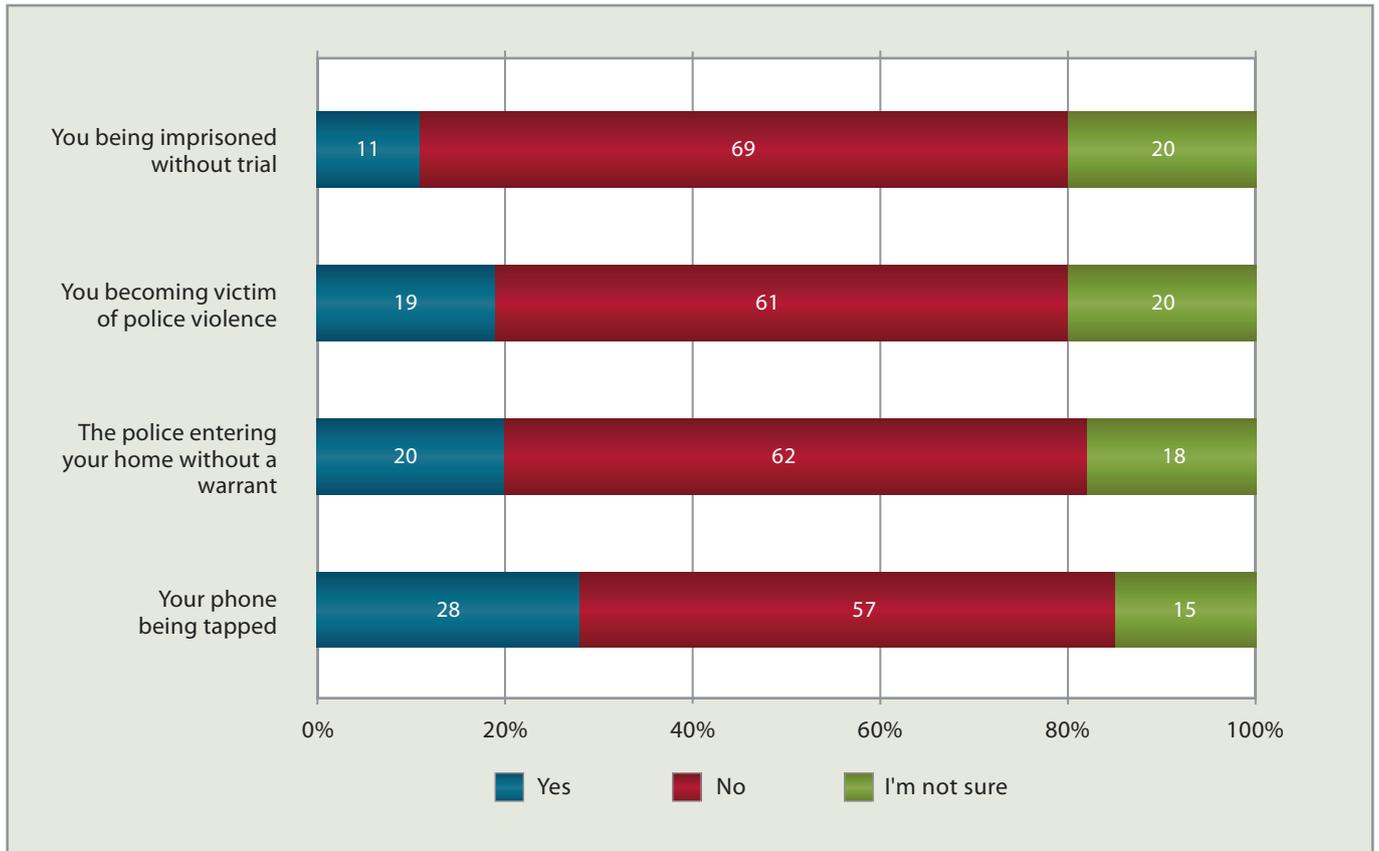


DEMOCRACY AS A SYSTEM OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The vast majority of respondents feel free to exercise their fundamental civil rights, including freedom of expression, right to be elected, and freedom of association. A significant share of actively employed people (between 65% and 78% depending on the question) are confident that they would not lose their job if they run as an independent municipal councilor or member of Parliament, if they criticized government decisions openly, if they participated in protests against the government, professed their religious be-

Question: *How likely it is for you to lose your job/business if... (answers for each option separately)? ("Yes" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Highly likely" and "Rather likely", while "No" includes the sum of respondents who have chosen the answers "Rather unlikely" and "Highly unlikely".)*

Figure 28. Risk of encroachment of privacy



Question: *Do you believe that there is a possibility for any of these events to happen to you in the next 12 months?*

liefs publicly or spoke a language other than Bulgarian in public (fig. 26).

Every fifth respondent, however, fear they could lose their job if they criticized government decisions publicly: 8% feel that this is very likely, while 14% believe this is rather likely to happen. This share is significantly higher among respondents who identify themselves as Roma and among people employed in the public sector – 35% of them believe it is very likely or rather likely to lose their job if they criticized government decisions openly, compared to a national average of 22% (fig. 27). Every fifth citizen, every third person who identify himself as Roma and every third respondent in public service are afraid to express freely their opinion on the performance of the government.

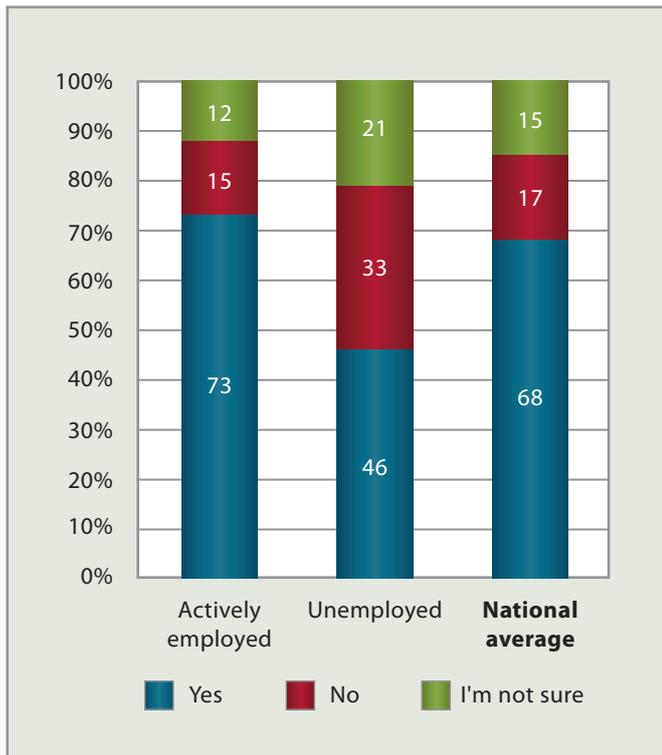
Approximately the same share of respondents fear that they may become victims of violence if they expressed their opinion freely. Every fifth respondent is afraid that if they criticized publicly the decisions of the current government or participated in pro-

tests against the government, they could be attacked by strangers in the street. This share is again higher among respondents who identify themselves as Roma: one third of them believe that it is very likely or rather likely to be beaten in the street, if they criticized government decisions openly.

The majority of respondents are not afraid of arbitrary use of force by the authorities or arbitrary invasion of their privacy on behalf of the government. Approximately 70% of the citizens believe that in the next 12 months they face no risk of being imprisoned without trial, become victim of police violence or see the police violate the privacy of their home without a warrant. The majority of respondents (57%) think that it is highly unlikely for their phone to be tapped by the police. There is a relatively high degree of confidence that law enforcement institutions are not being used arbitrarily by the government and in most cases act within the law.

However, the cohort of respondents who believe that they could become victim of arbitrary action by

Figure 29. Protection of minority rights by employment status

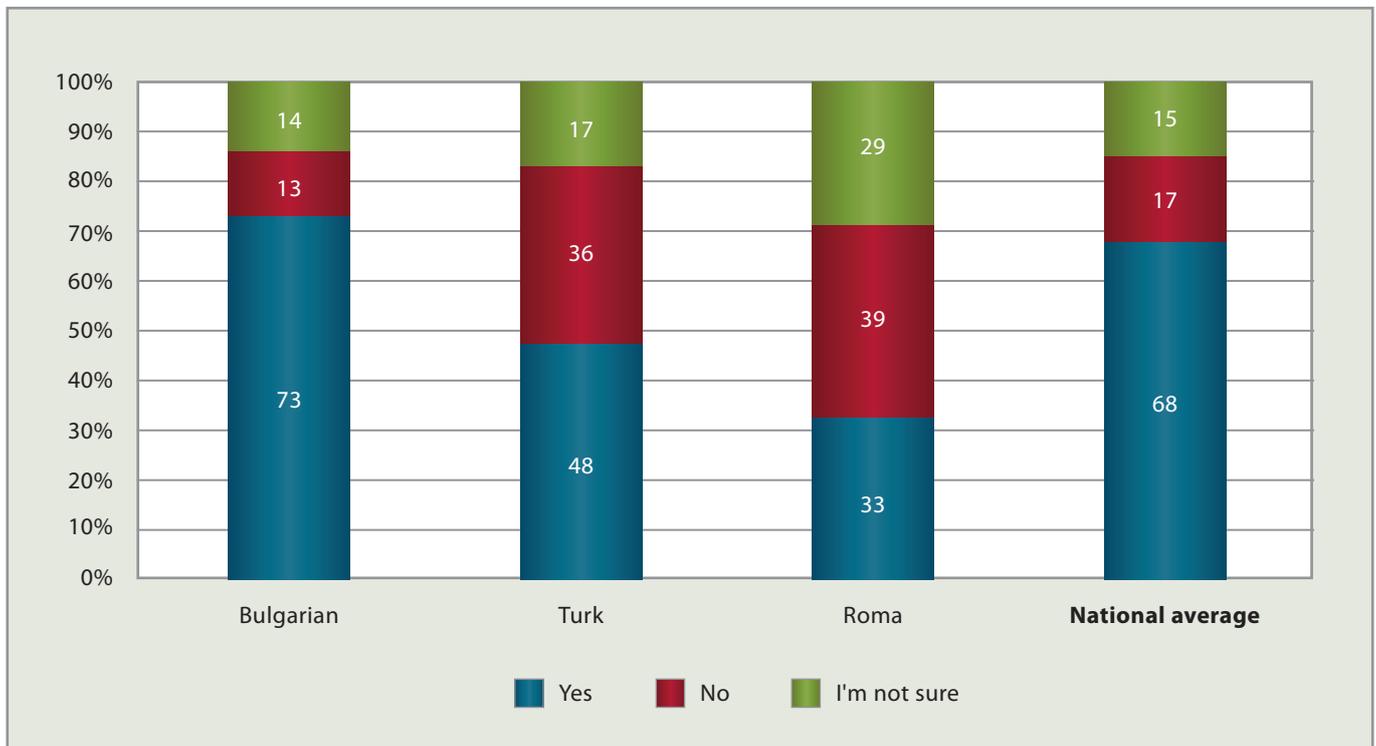


Question: Do you agree with the following statement: "Minority rights are adequately protected in Bulgaria"?

law enforcement institutions is not insignificant and one can assume that this fear influences the way people exercise their civil rights. More than one fourth of the respondents (28%) believe that in the next 12 months their phone may be tapped by the police; every fifth respondent feel that their home may be raided by the police without a warrant or they may become victim of police violence, while every tenth fear that they may be imprisoned without trial (fig. 28).

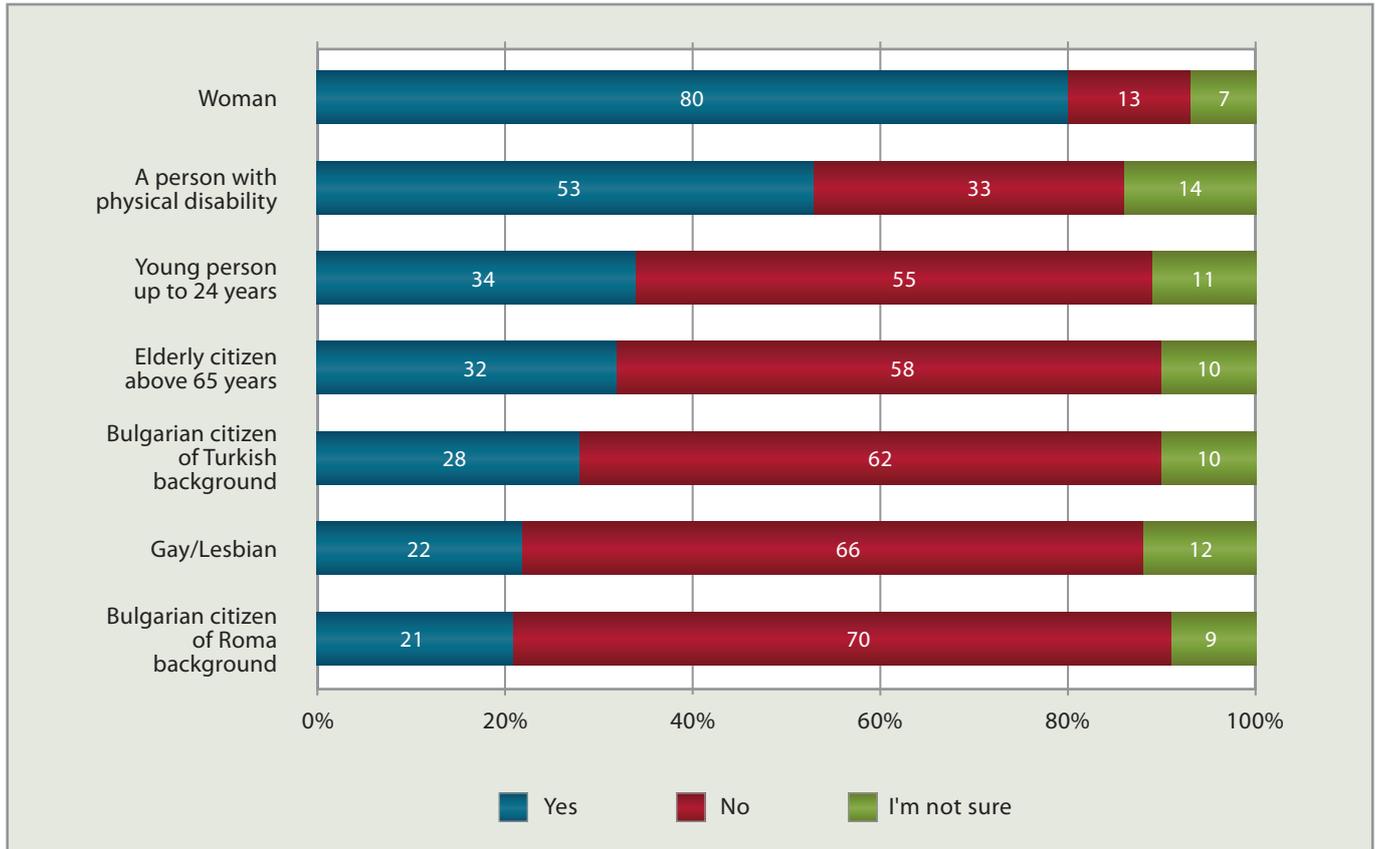
Fear of phone tapping is more common in certain social groups: 42% of the residents of Sofia believe that their phone may be tapped by the police against a national average of 28%. This fear is also more common among more affluent, better educated and younger respondents, as well as among the residents of the Southwestern Region (dominated by Sofia). Conversely, people who live in rural areas, elderly citizens above 60 years of age and respondents with basic education are less likely to fear that their phone may be tapped by the police. Nearly 80% of those living in the North Central Region and in the Northwestern region do not believe that their phone could be tapped by the police, which is much higher than the national average of 57%.

Figure 30. Protection of minority rights by ethnic background



Question: Do you agree with the following statement: "Minority rights are adequately protected in Bulgaria"?

Figure 31. Discriminatory attitudes



Question: *If you were to choose between two candidates for Mayor with similar qualification and political views, would you vote for someone who was...?*

A significant majority of respondents (68%) believe that the rights of minorities are adequately protected in Bulgaria, while an average of 17% disagree with this statement (fig. 29). This share is twice as high among respondents who identify themselves as Roma or Turks (fig. 30), as well as among the unemployed, the poor and the people with primary or lower education. There are significant regional differences in these attitudes: 85% of the people living in the Northwestern Region tend to believe that the rights of minorities in the country are adequately protected, compared to a national average of 68%. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the respondents who live in the Southeastern Region, only 48% of whom believe that the rights of minorities in Bulgarian are adequately protected, compared to an average of 68% for the country.

Despite the general perception that the rights of minorities are adequately protected, there are very strong discrimination attitudes towards certain minorities. If they had to choose between candidates

for Mayor with comparable qualification and political programs, 70% of the respondents would not vote for a Bulgarian citizens of Roma background, 66% would not vote for a homosexual male or female, 62% would not vote for a Bulgarian citizen of Turkish background, 58% would not vote for an elderly candidate (above 65 years of age), and 55% would not vote for a young person (below 24 years of age). Other conditions being equal, one third of the respondents would not vote for a candidate who has some physical disability, while 13% would not vote for a woman (fig. 31).

Discrimination attitudes are stronger against Roma and against homosexual persons. Other conditions being equal, a Roma candidate running for mayor would rally the support of respondents who identify themselves as Roma (53%), respondents who identify themselves as Turks (38%), people with primary education (35%) and young people aged up to 29 years (36%), against a national average of 21%. Support for Roma candidates running for mayor is weakest among

the people who live in small towns (only 14% of them would vote for a Roma candidate compared to an average of 21% for the country) and among the respondents above 65 years of age (only 15% of them would support a Roma candidate).

A homosexual person running for mayor would rally greater support among the residents of Sofia, 37% of whom would vote for a homosexual candidate (against a national average of 22%). Conversely, discriminatory attitudes against homosexual persons are strongest among the people living in the Northwestern Region – 81% would not support a homosexual candidate for mayor compared to an average of 66% for the country.

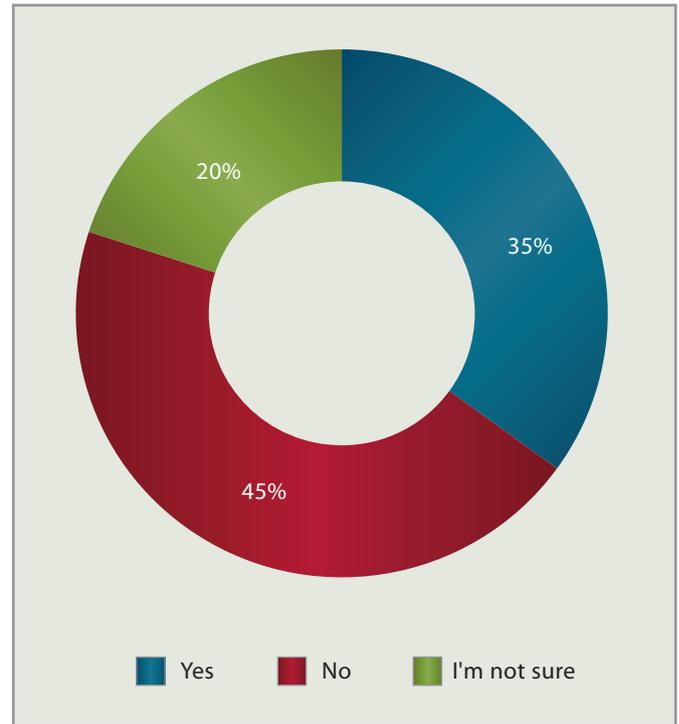
Generally, the support for women candidates is significant but there are some differences, which deserve to be noted. The residents of Sofia are more likely than the average citizen to support a woman running for mayor (91% of them would vote for a woman against a national average of 80%), while this support is lower among the respondents who live in rural areas: 73% of them would vote for a woman. People with university or college education are more likely to vote for a woman candidate, while people with basic or lower than basic education are less likely than the average citizen to support a woman running for mayor – only 56% of them would vote for a woman compared to an average of 80%.

Respondents who identify themselves as Turks and those who identify themselves as Roma are far less likely than the average citizen to support a woman candidate: 66% of the respondents who identify themselves as Turks and only 51% those who identify themselves as Roma would vote for a woman (against a national average of 80%).

RELIABLE INFORMATION ON THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT

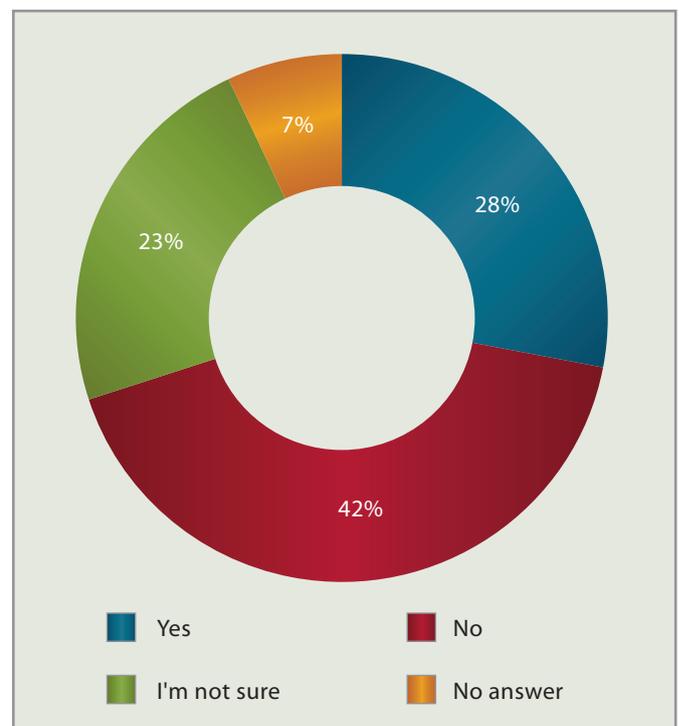
According to the Green Paper on the Future of Democracy in Europe, cited above, one of the main advantages of democracies to authoritarian regimes is that they generate more accurate information on the business of government and the changes in the inter-

Figure 32. Public opinion of the objectivity of television



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "If a senior official were involved in a crime, television channels in Bulgaria would reveal the truth"?*

Figure 33. Public opinion of the objectivity of the press



Question: *Would you agree with the following statement: "If a senior official were involved in a crime, newspapers in Bulgaria would reveal the truth"?*

nal and external environment, which allows for better governance decisions, on the one hand, and greater civic involvement in governance, on the other. The availability of reliable information on the business of government is also an important prerequisite for seeking and imposing political accountability for the failure of individual public policies. As the authors of the report note, “accountability is the summum bonum of democracy”.

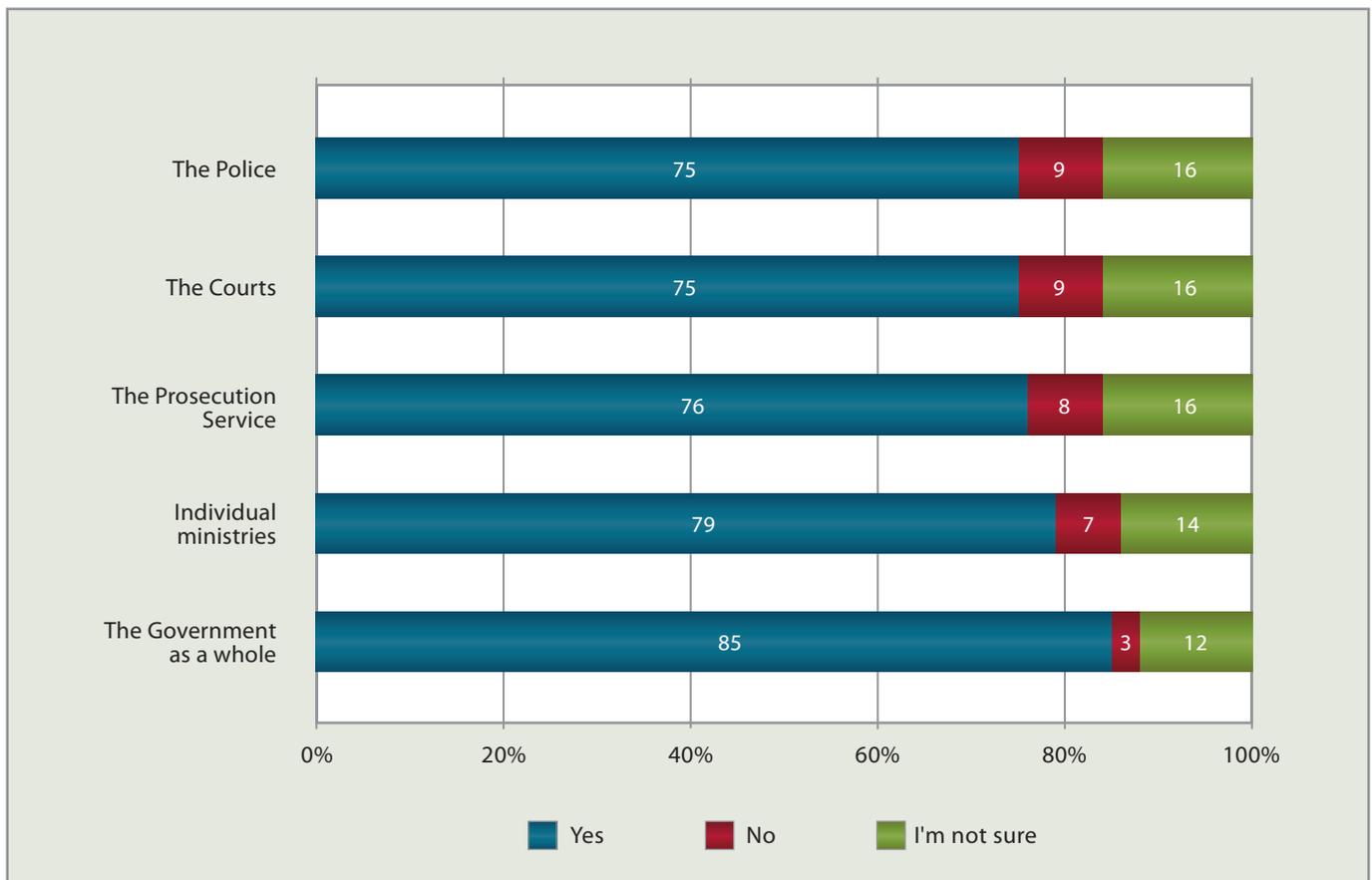
Public opinion is divided on whether citizens receive enough information from newspapers and TV channels to be able to assess the performance of the government. The share of respondents who have given a positive answer to this question is exactly the same as the share of those who have replied negatively – 40%. One fifth of the people are not sure how to answer this question. Those who believe that newspapers and TV channels provide enough information for citizens to assess the performance of the government

are slightly more among people who live in district towns (48% agreed with this statement, while 40% disagreed), among the residents of Sofia, among university or college graduates and among those who use the internet often.

People living in the North Central Region are more convinced that citizens receive enough information from newspapers and TV channels to be able to assess the performance of the government: 57% of them agree with this statement (against a national average of 40%), 30% disagree, while only 13% were not sure. People with basic education and respondents who live in small towns are also more likely to feel that they receive enough information from the media.

The majority of respondents (45%) disagreed with the statement that TV channels would reveal the truth if a senior official were involved in a crime (fig. 32). Asked to rate the same statement with re-

Figure 34. Mandatory reporting to Parliament



Question: *Do you believe that authorities should issue annual reports on their activity, which should be discussed and approved by Parliament?*

spect to newspapers, 42% of the respondents said that they did not expect the press to reveal the truth (fig. 33). Confidence in the objectivity of the media is greater among the people who live in the North Central Region: 55% of them believe that TV channels would reveal the truth against a national average of 35%, while 47% would rely on newspapers to report the truth (compared to an average of 28%).

The opinion on the objectivity of TV channels should be seen as authoritative, since 90% of the respondents report that they watch TV every day. Newspapers are a less common source of information – only 18% of the respondents read newspapers every day – and hence, the share of people who were not sure of the objectivity of the press is higher. Approximately one third of the respondents (31%) do not read newspapers at all.

The issue of the access to reliable information on the business of government is not limited to the freedom and professionalism of the media. In democratic countries, government institutions publish regular reports on their activities, evaluate the results of different public policies and conduct preliminary impact assessments of proposed changes in the legislation. Such papers usually provide a basis for parliamentary control over the performance of the government. The changes in the Bulgarian Constitution adopted in 2006, introduced mandatory reporting to Parliament for all institutions whose members are elected by Parliament, as well as for the judiciary. The annual report of the Prosecutor General covers also the results of the police in investigating crimes. However, neither the government, nor the individual ministries submit annual reports to Parliament on their performance in the implementation of public policies.

The constitutional reform conducted in 2006 sought to ensure greater accountability of state institutions and albeit partially, responds to the dominant public expectations. A considerable majority of respondents (between 75% and 85%) believe that authorities should issue annual reports on their activity, which should be discussed and approved by Parliament (fig. 34). There is also significant public support for the introduction of mandatory reporting for mayors: 78% of the respondents believe that mayors should present annual reports to the local community.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Public attitudes towards democracy, the rule of law and the protection of the fundamental civil rights are influenced significantly by the geographical region in which respondents live. People living in the North Central Region (comprising the districts of Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse, Silistra and Razgrad) are much more likely than the average citizen to trust democracy as the best form of government, to have confidence in the institutions and to perceive the media as impartial. The residents of the North Central Region are the only demographic group in the country in which the share of respondents who expect to receive a fair trial is higher than the percentage of those who are skeptical of the fairness of justice.

The respondents from the North Central Region and the residents of Sofia are more likely to believe that the government in Bulgaria is acting within the law. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the inhabitants of the Northwestern Region who are much less likely than the average citizen to believe in democracy as the best form of government and to participate in public life. They also have less immediate experience with the courts and less knowledge of key concepts of democracy: between one fourth and one third of them replied “I’m not sure” to key survey questions, which is the highest share across the country and suggests lack of personal experience with or lack of understanding of concepts such as “democracy”, “fair trial” or “fundamental rights”.

The place of residence is an important factor for citizens’ involvement in governance and for their perception of democracy. The residents of Sofia have considerable experience with different form of civic participation, they are much more likely to participate in protests and petitions and have greater confidence in democracy as the best form of government than people living in small towns and villages. This however is not true for all matters addressed in the survey. Public perceptions of the quality of law (clarity, comprehensibility, equal application to all) do not differ signifi-

cantly from the average among the residents of Sofia. The share of those of them who have entered a court building in the last 12 months is comparable to that registered in villages. On this particular matter, district towns seem to provide better access to justice, since their inhabitants tend to interact with courts more often than the average citizen, while for the people living in Sofia and in villages this access seems to be affected by some constraints.

Confidence in democracy, as well as the likelihood for civic involvement in decision-making is influenced to some extent by the respondents' level of education and income: people with university or college education and people with income higher than 567 BGN per household member are more likely than the average citizen to believe in democracy as the best form of government for Bulgaria, as well as to get involved in different forms of civic participation. However, better educated and more affluent people tend to feel more threatened by invasion of privacy on behalf of the police: 36% of the respondents with university or college education and a comparable share of the people with high income fear that in the next 12 months their phone may be tapped by the police, compared to 21% of the people with primary or lower than primary education and 16% of the people with basic education.

People with primary or lower than primary education, as well as respondents who identify themselves as Roma are far more likely than the average citizen to reply "I'm not sure" to most of the questions related to democracy, civil rights and the rule of law. Half of the respondents with primary or lower than primary education are not sure whether democracy is the best form of government for Bulgaria.

The age of the respondents matters not so much as an indication for considerable differences among individual age groups but rather as a warning for the marginalization of people above 60 years of age: the elderly are far less likely to get involved in various forms of civic participation, they interact with courts less often and have less confidence in democracy. On the other hand, they feel relatively better protected in the exercise of their rights and less threatened of arbitrary actions on behalf of the authorities.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the ethnic background of the respondents influences their perception of democracy, fundamental rights and the

rule of law because a considerable share of the respondents who identify themselves as Roma have low level of education and both serve as factors for exclusion. People who identify themselves as Roma seldom participate in forms of political action such as protests or petitions and are much more likely to believe that minority rights are not adequately protected. A particularly important finding is that one third of the employed Roma are afraid that they might lose their job or become victim of violence, if they criticized the government or participated in protests. This share is much higher than the average for the country and suggests a serious degree of self-censorship among employed Roma, which prevents them to participate actively in public debates on the efficiency of key public policies.

The extent to which the respondents' employment status influences their perception of democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law is an issue that needs to be examined more thoroughly in future studies, most probably applying a different methodology. The current survey distinguished between people employed in the public sector and people employed in the private sector based on an initial assumption that public sector employees would have greater confidence in institutions and better opinion on the clarity and comprehensibility of laws than the average citizen. This assumption, however, was not confirmed unequivocally by the findings. The perception of the people in public service with regard to the quality of law does not differ significantly from that of other respondents: 30% of the public servants would agree that laws in the country are fair compared to a national average of 22%. As regards the clarity, comprehensibility and equal application of laws, the opinion of public sector employees is the same as that of other respondents.

Some differences influenced by the respondents' employment status emerged with regard to two other questions: public sector employees are much more likely to believe that they would receive a fair trial if they had to go to court: 44% of them expressed this opinion compared to a national average of 33%. Public servants are also more likely to fear that they would lose their job if they participated in protests or criticized the government openly. This could be interpreted to suggest that public servants tend to be more loyal to the government than to the law. Fear

of dismissal and self-censorship among public sector employees may create risks for the advancement of democratic values in Bulgaria.

CONCLUSION

The survey sought to identify public attitudes towards democracy, seen as a complex of interrelated processes and values in which power shifts hands in competition among political parties, the government is accountable for its actions, citizens enjoy fundamental rights and participate equally in governance, and the rule of law is guaranteed.

The survey found that the most important achievement of democracy in the country so far is the confidence in a significant percentage of the citizens that they can exercise freely their fundamental civil rights. Nearly two thirds of the respondents believe that they are not threatened by dismissal or arbitrary violence, if they openly criticized government decisions or participated in protests against the government. Almost 80% of the respondents feel that there is no risk for them to lose their job or become victim of arbitrary violence, if they professed their religious beliefs openly and publicly or spoke a language other than Bulgarian in public. More than 70% of the respondents believe that they would face no negative consequences, if they joined a trade union. These findings suggest that the majority of citizens feel that their fundamental political rights (the right to expression and the right to association) are adequately protected and can be exercised freely.

This confidence, however, is much lower among certain social groups of active-age people: one third of the persons in public service and one third of the people who identify themselves as Roma consider it more likely or very likely to lose their job, if they openly criticized government decisions. These two groups tend to impose self-censorship and to voluntarily exclude themselves from the public discourse on important policy issues.

The survey demonstrated also that “democracy” as a concept enjoys public confidence and support: 52% of the respondents agree that this is the best form of government for Bulgaria. Public support for the rep-

lication of foreign models of government, which are incompatible with democracy, is weak: according to 40% of the respondents, Germany is the best example of good governance for Bulgaria and should serve as a “role model” in strengthening Bulgarian institutions. The other two countries most often cited as examples of good governance – United Kingdom and Switzerland – are also democratic.

However, the declared support and approval for democracy as the best form of government for Bulgaria is abstract. It contradicts the prevailing attitudes towards institutions and processes, which are actually involved in the business of government and define it as truly “democratic”. Citizens have very low confidence in the institutions of representative democracy (parliament, political parties, government), which suggests that the conflict between nominal approval for democracy and passivity and low confidence in institutions, which was identified in the study “State of Democracy 2008” still persists and has even deepened in some areas.

The tendency towards growing regional differences, which was registered in the study “State of Society 2008”, was also confirmed in this survey; moreover, it no longer has only economic dimensions but also important implications on the dominant attitudes toward the institutions of representative democracy. Nevertheless, one cannot claim that people’s perception of the fundamental democratic values is directly influenced by their income status. The residents of Sofia have much higher income but their confidence in institutions and in the rule of law does not differ significantly from the average for the country. It is the inhabitants of the North Central Region who have a slightly higher confidence in institutions, feel more adequately represented in government and are more likely to expect a fair trial, so national examples of good governance could be sought in this region.

At the time of the survey, citizens perceived the country’s government as inefficient (unable to solve their major problems), exclusive (large social groups do not participate in governance) and unfair (no guarantees for equality among citizens and the rule of law).

According to the majority of respondents the main challenges currently facing the country are poverty, unemployment and corruption (far behind the first

two) and the dominant opinion is that the government is not coping well with addressing them, i.e. there is a serious discrepancy between society's priorities and agenda and the government's priorities and agenda. The reasons and mechanisms for this discrepancy can be identified to some extent in the registered public perceptions of the two main "mediators" of democratic governance, which help bridge the gap between the agenda of society and the agenda of the government: political parties and the media. According to the dominant public opinion, party leaders and even representatives of the business have greater influence on the leadership of political parties than ordinary members. A considerable share of respondents also are of the opinion that the leadership of the main political parties in the country is influenced by organized crime. The ability of the media to provide objective and reliable information on the business of government is also questioned. These two factors determine the discrepancy between society's agenda and the government's agenda, and this is the first serious challenge to the Bulgarian democratic model.

The second challenge to democracy in Bulgaria is the exclusion of large groups of citizens from governance. For the majority of the citizens, involvement in politics is limited to one form only: voting in elections. The vast majority of people (80%) do not participate in any organized form of public life. Less than one third of the respondents (28%) did not vote in the last elections and less than 8% are involved in political parties; in the last 12 months only 11% of the people have signed a petition. Exclusion from public life is a particularly serious problem for people living in rural areas, elderly citizens, people with low level of education and unemployed persons. Due to their limited involvement in political and public life, most of the people feel underrepresented in political bodies: the majority of respondents (54%) are of the opinion that in the Parliament there is not a single MP from their constituency whom they trust and who protects their interests.

Poverty and poor education are major factors for the exclusion of large social groups from public life. Widespread discriminatory attitudes, however, also have a role to play. Other conditions being equal, 70%

of the respondents would not vote for a Bulgarian citizen of Roma background running for mayor, 66% would not vote for a homosexual male or female, while 62% would not vote for a Bulgarian citizen of Turkish background. More than half of the respondents would not support candidates for mayor who are too young or too old, while one third would not vote for a person with disabilities. Ostensibly, women are not subject to discriminatory attitudes: 80% of the respondents claim that other conditions being equal, they would support a female candidate for mayor but this support is 12% lower among respondents who identify themselves as Turks and 30% lower among respondents who identify themselves as Roma.

The third major challenge to democracy in Bulgaria is related to the unfinished reforms towards establishing and strengthening the rule of law. Public opinion about the quality of legislation and its ability to regulate social relations effectively and fairly is highly negative: 77% of the respondents disagree with the statement that laws in the country apply equally to all; 69% feel that laws are not clear and comprehensible, while 58% believe that the laws in Bulgaria are not fair. A considerable majority of people perceive the government as a transgressor (41% of the respondents disagree with the statement that the government in Bulgaria is acting within the law), while more than one third of the respondents do not feel confident that courts can prevent the government from violating the law.

The major benefit (the summum bonum) of democracy is an accountable and responsible government. Yet in the current Bulgarian conditions this has been only partially achieved. Periodic parliamentary elections and the change of parties in government ensure that over a given period of time political parties would take responsibility for the success or failure of their governance. However, the majority of respondents agree that the change of parties in government does not result in changes in the overall state policy, while the low public confidence in the judiciary and the Parliament suggests that these institutions still lack the capacity to seek and impose accountability to a government currently in office. For these reasons, there is a constant risk for the country's government to shift back to an authoritarian mode.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO PUBLIC POLICIES PROMOTING THE FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES

The study of public attitudes towards fundamental democratic values reveals a complex and intricate set of challenges to the democratic development of the country. Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort, including by expanding opportunities and mechanisms for citizens' participation in decision-making at central and local level and strengthening the credibility of civil society organizations as a reliable partner of institutions in the elaboration and implementation of public policies.

Inasmuch as they exist, programs supporting and promoting democracy in Bulgaria should also seek to support and promote the rule of law, media freedom and the protection of fundamental civil rights because the fundamental values of democratic governance are closely related to each other and should be addressed in a coordinated approach.

Inasmuch as they exist, programs supporting the continuation of judicial reforms and promoting the rule of law should seek not only to strengthen the independence and professionalism of the judiciary but also to improve the quality of legislation and ensure

the accountability of executive and judiciary institutions.

In view of the above, the following recommendations can be made:

- ▶ Young people and adults should be involved in different forms of civic education that would help them develop an understanding of the rules under which institutions in a democratic state operate and strengthen their awareness of the fundamental human rights guaranteed by the Constitution;
- ▶ The government ought to create and maintain a free internet data base with the full text of all active legislation;
- ▶ The process of law making, whether initiated by the government or by members of Parliament, should mandatorily include preliminary and ex post impact assessment of legislation and public discussion of proposed new bills;
- ▶ All ministries should submit annual reports to the Parliament covering not only budget execution but also the results of the public policies they implement;
- ▶ Local divisions of central government authorities (courts, police, prosecution service) should issue periodic reports and discuss the results of their performance with the local community;
- ▶ Measures should be elaborated and adopted to strengthen the capacity and independence of the administrative justice system and of the Supreme Administrative Court in particular that monitors the legality of the government's actions.

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